

All Religions in Rome: Architectural Depictions, the Valle-Medici Reliefs, and the Creation of a Cosmopolis

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[Slide 1] Some of the best-known architectural depictions in Roman art are the three temples found on a series of reliefs known collectively as the Ara Pietatis or Valle-Medici Reliefs. Their fame has grown in part because these early architectural depictions are so visually striking and present a wealth of decorative detail. But the most important reason is that these depictions are believed to be identifiable representations of historical buildings. This has made them appealing not only to scholars of architectural depictions, but also to those interested in the topography and reconstruction of historical temples.

Despite their renown, analysis of the Valle-Medici architectural depictions has rarely moved beyond the historic buildings they illustrate, with scholarship focused almost exclusively on which buildings are represented and why those buildings in particular were chosen. Most scholars have thought that the depictions and their high level of detail are explained sufficiently by a need to establish topographic specificity for the illustrated sacrifices. [2] Fred Albertson, for example, argues that “background facades such as these...serve to identify the foreground event.” Similarly, Mario Torelli writes that “the action is perfectly localized by the introduction

of topographic symbols, represented by the temple structures, sculptured with great care so that they may easily be recognized.” Such topographic precision in turn is usually explained by some need to represent specific historic events accurately, or concerns for emphasizing dynastic connections. To give one influential example, Eugenio La Rocca has argued that the Valle-Medici Reliefs are the remnants of an altar set up in celebration of Claudius’ triumphant return from Britain, and that the depicted buildings illustrate a series of historical sacrifices at temples connected by common ties to the Imperial cult and, crucially, Claudius’ birthday.

The identification of the Valle-Medici depictions, while important, nevertheless was only one aspect of these works of art. As will be seen, many important features of the depictions cannot be explained by a need to provide topographic information. Pursuing the representations’ connection to historical temples, and going no farther, misses critical aspects of these representations’ potential impact. An analysis of the Valle-Medici Reliefs can demonstrate how the significance of depicted architecture can extend beyond identification, even for monuments where that identification is clear and emphasized.

[3] The first part of my talk this afternoon will outline how architecture is represented on the Valle-Medici Reliefs, focusing on what details were chosen for inclusion. The second part will explore the significance of the details and how the temples are represented, specifically how they work together to present a particular vision of Rome. The third part will contextualize the Valle-Medici depictions within the history of monumental reliefs and the socio-political development of Rome.

At this time, I need to pause for a brief note about terminology. [4] In this talk, I will use the phrase “monumental reliefs” to refer to large-scale sculptures, which were set up in publicly

accessible space, by groups or individuals acting in the capacity of official positions of authority. Scholars traditionally refer to these sort of sculptures as “historical” or “state” reliefs, but both of these terms carry serious methodological baggage. “Historical” reliefs derives from the assumption that the reliefs’ purpose was to illustrate historical events, an assumption which has fallen out of favor. “State reliefs” implies that the monuments were set up by a unified, coherent political body, a model of the Roman government that is also being called into question. Since in this talk I will be querying both of these assumptions for the Valle-Medici Reliefs, I will use the phrase “monumental reliefs,” a more neutral term that focuses on the reliefs’ impressive size and commemorative purpose.

Turning to a related issue, one of the great research questions in Roman sculpture is exactly how monumental reliefs were commissioned, designed, and executed. [5] The few extant dedicatory inscriptions we have record that the monuments were set up, at least nominally, by the Senate and People of Rome for the emperor. Recent scholarship has tended to take these inscriptions at their word, interpreting monumental reliefs as a means by which the Senate expressed its loyalty and expectations to the imperial regime. How far into the process of production we can trace Senatorial oversight is unclear, however: should we imagine broad directives like “build an arch,” or Tacitus telling sculptors to move the third flamen’s head slightly to the left? Given our uncertainties on the subject, in this talk I will cheat and use the term “the production team” to refer to anyone and everyone involved in the production of the reliefs.

[6] The Valle-Medici Reliefs consist of a collection of fragmentary panels that show processions and sacrifices in front of three large temples. [7] These reliefs are thought to derive from a single

structure typically reconstructed as a monumental altar, based on similarities with the *Ara Pacis Augustae*. [8] As is fairly typical for monumental reliefs, the exact location, date, and identification of the monument as a whole are hotly debated, since the reliefs were not found in situ.

[9] Scholars have identified the panels as belonging to the same original monument based on similarities in style, scale, and technique. The panels are thought to have all been discovered in roughly the same area, near the chiesa di Santa Maria in via Lata in Rome. [10] The segments with the octastyle and hexastyle temples were reportedly found re-used as spolia in Diocletian's Arcus Novus; [11] from there they were moved to the Palazzo Delle Valle, before being immured high on the garden façade of the Villa Medici, [12] where they remain today (as a result, these panels are studied primarily through casts). The relief fragment with the tetrastyle temple was found in excavations near the same church between 1923 and 1933.

[13] There is general consensus that the altar from which the reliefs are derived should be dated to the Julio-Claudian period (14-68 CE), although it should be noted that this date, while widely accepted, is based exclusively on sculptural style, rather than some historical detail. More chronological precision for the altar has been a point of contention, and is typically based on the altar's identification. The reliefs for a long time were assigned to the so-called *Ara Pietatis Augustae*, a monument supposedly set up by Tiberius. Gerhard Koeppl, however, persuasively called into question the very existence of any ancient *Ara Pietatis*, and this identification, if not the nomenclature, was effectively dropped. Subsequent identifications of the original monument have included the Claudian *Ara Gentis Iuliae*, a different hypothetical Claudian monument commemorating his return from Britain, and a theorized monument celebrating Nero's return to Rome in 59 CE following his providential rescue of Rome from his mother.

Just as for the date, the broad overall message of the monument seems clear, while further refinements vary according to a given theory's identification of the original altar. The similarities to the Ara Pacis in form, subject matter, and date suggest that the Julio-Claudian monument was some sort of dynastic statement involving Augustus. Here the particular historical temples depicted on the reliefs have played a role, since two of them have been identified as temples associated with Augustus. Most interpretations have sought to see some sort of further significance in the particular Augustan temples depicted on the reliefs, but this ultimately has proven unhelpful, in part because scholars cannot agree on which temples are represented.

Despite centuries of scholarship, a resolution to the question of the identity of the original monument for the Valle-Medici Reliefs remains elusive. As such, the significance of the identities of the temples represented on that monument also remains an open question. On the one hand, modern scholarship's inability to unlock any specific topographic significance in the historical temples may not be unexpected, given the numerous lacunae in our understanding of the Roman religious landscape. On the other hand, it may indicate that scholarship is on the wrong track: that the significance of the buildings lies not in their relationship to particular historical events, but in their relationship to something else entirely. That something else may in fact be the ways in which the temples could be represented visually. Rather than background, in other words, the architectural depictions may be a driving force in the monument's overall impact.

I would like to dive into my analysis of the Valle-Medici Reliefs with an overview of how the temples are represented, since I think I can safely assume not everyone knows these reliefs by

heart. [14] The largest temple shown on the Reliefs is Corinthian octastyle. It is depicted frontally, with the façade slightly angled against the background. A good portion of the façade has been given over to a tall podium. The façade of the temple is elongated vertically, particularly in the column shafts. [15] Blocks of ashlar masonry, shown over a plain socle, are demarcated through the use of channeling, which some authors have seen as a reflection of actual late-republican or Augustan architecture. [16] Care has been taken to articulate the various parts of the column bases, which combine finely carved scotia and torus moldings on top of a low, square plinth. [17] The columns support an entablature divided into an architrave with three fasciae, a plain frieze, and a row of dentils. The single, rather large corner acroterion represents a flying Victory.

[18] Seven figures fill the pediment. [19] The central figure (traditionally identified as Mars) is a standing, half-nude male holding a staff and scepter, flanked by parallel sets of three figures each, positioned to fill the triangular space of the pediment. [20] These figures, coupled with the temple's octastyle form, have led scholars to identify this depiction as the Temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus.

[21] The second largest depicted temple is Corinthian hexastyle, shown in three-quarters view with an emphasis on the front facade. Like the octastyle temple, the hexastyle façade features elongated proportions, particularly of the column shafts. [22] The podium of this temple is the best preserved of all the Valle-Medici examples, with a small altar inserted at the bottom of 15 steps. The columns are similar, although not identical to, the columns of the octastyle temple in their bases, shafts, and capitals. [23] Behind the columns, the façade is decorated with a plain socle and the rectangular hatching of ashlar masonry. A large blank door with a molded lintel can be seen behind the three central intercolumniations.

[24] The entablature of the hexastyle temple is also similar to that of the octastyle temple, with the addition of dentils on all sides of the cornice. A single acroterion, possibly one of the Korybantes, stands directly on a large ornamental sima. [25] A tile roof, with three rows of articulated pan and cover tiles, as well as palmette antefixes, runs along the length of the flank. [26] The pedimental arrangement is strikingly different from that of the octastyle temple: the center is occupied by a mural crown on a throne, flanked by two lounging figures, with crouching beasts in the corners. This iconography has been connected to the cult of Magna Mater, and the temple identified as the Palatine Temple of Magna Mater, specifically as restored by Augustus.

[27] The relief with the third temple, an Ionic tetrastyle structure, is rather fragmentary. Enough of the temple is preserved to show that it also featured an elongated façade and a podium with at least eight steps. [28] The Ionic capitals are extremely compressed but still carefully articulated. The central intercolumniation overlaps a large open door with a molded lintel, but in this case the façade does not have rectangular hatching or socle. [29] The entablature, pediment, and carved sima are very similar to that of the hexastyle temple. A tile roof with articulated pan and cover tiles extends to the right of the façade.

[30] The pedimental sculpture represents a battle scene, where the eight figures' positions are adapted to fill the triangular space. This dynamic pedimental arrangement is puzzling, given that Roman temples are assumed to have featured primarily vertical figures like those seen on the octastyle temple. Indeed some scholars have suggested that that the tetrastyle temple shows a pedimental group re-located from a Greek temple to a historical Roman temple. Identifications of this temple have varied widely, and have included the Temple of Fides on the Capitoline, the

Temple of Victory on the Palatine, the Temple of the Penates on the Velia, and even the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus.

[31] As I have already mentioned, scholarship on the depicted temples of the Valle-Medici Reliefs has tended to focus narrowly on the identification of the depictions with historical buildings in Rome. Such associations generally are thought sufficient to explain every facet of the depictions. Yet there are several features of the depictions that are not addressed through such theories. The association of these depictions with specific, historical temples was obviously a crucial factor behind why the depictions were included in their original monument. But such associations do not explain everything.

Specifically, theories reliant entirely on historical identifications do not fully explain why such care was taken in many details of the depicted temples. One may argue, of course, that all of these details simply record features of the actual temples the depictions represent, and thus are related to the identifications of the buildings. As we are coming to realize, however, Roman artists rarely seem to have been overwhelmed by a spirit of documentary accuracy and precision in their depictions of buildings. [32] To give but one obvious example, the Capitoline Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus in Rome, perhaps the most prominent building in the Roman Empire, varies in its depictions depending on circumstance, [33] even for basic details like the number of façade columns.

One must keep in mind, furthermore, that the majority of viewers of the Valle-Medici Reliefs, in contrast to the archaeologists who study them, would know what the depicted buildings looked like. [34] The detail of the architrave with three fasciae, while fascinating to scholars seeking to

reconstruct the Temple of Mars Ultor, probably offered little specific information to the ancient viewer. Pedimental sculpture and context would be the primary means of identification. In other words, although the delicate molded bases, intricate capitals, immaculate fluting, and copious dentils of the Valle-Medici depictions may have reflected the appearance of actual temples, these features could have done little to clarify the identity of the depicted structures. The repetition of many features for all three depictions underscores this point. Similarly, the ashlar masonry of the walls and the tile roofs could not be identifying criteria, since these would have been features of most temples erected in Rome from at least Augustus onward.

A more productive approach is to ask why the production team chose to include the details that they did. [35] Why bother to carefully depict a podium, crowned by a socle, crowned by drafted ashlar construction? What affect could that have on the intended viewer? How could such details contribute to the overall message of the original monument? To answer these questions we must examine how these details work both separately and together.

In the first place, the three main temples are all depicted in a way that reflects traditionally Roman ideas about that particular architectural form. Podium temples with frontal stairs have long been recognized in scholarship as a distinctively Etruscan-Roman architectural form. The tall façades and high podia of the depictions evoke the emphasis on façade and height stressed in actual monumental temples in the capital. [36] In particular, the elongation of the depicted columns recalls the soaring effect of the 50 foot shafts on *aedes* such as the Temple of Mars Ultor. The depictions, in other words, capture something of what must have been the effect of standing at the base of a monumental temple in Rome. The way the façades are depicted thus accentuates that the sacrifices illustrated on the reliefs take place within a specific religious landscape, that of imperial Rome.

[37] This approach to rendering temples can be compared to that taken in a series of Neoattic votive plaques, clearly stylized to evoke Greek examples. In one found in Rome, the shrine is shown at an angle that emphasizes the long columned peristyle, rather than a soaring façade. Indeed, the façade is partially obscured. There is nothing particularly natural or inevitable, in other words, in how the Valle-Medici temples are illustrated.

Moving in closer, great care has been taken to show the luxurious, elaborate decoration of the Valle-Medici temples. While many of these details could add little to the identity of the depictions, the cumulative effect of all these details had the potential for great thematic impact. Taken together, all of these details recall the extravagant architectural luxury that was coming to characterize Rome in the Julio-Claudian period. One should remember that in the early first century CE, the monumental temple, particularly on the scale favored by Augustus and his family, was a relatively new phenomenon and still something worth celebrating. [38] As the famous passage in Suetonius attests, this architectural luxury was also particularly associated with Augustus. The elaboration of the depicted temples in the Valle-Medici Reliefs therefore might be a Julio-Claudian dynastic statement in and of itself.

[39] Going further, one should note the interplay between sameness and variety in the three depictions. On the one hand, the same repetition that renders the details like dentils useless in establishing identity ties the depictions together. All three temples are depicted in a similar enough fashion to create the impression of a densely populated yet unified religious landscape.

[40] The message is that Rome has not only one major temple, like Ephesus or Didyma, but an entire landscape of beautiful temples working together. Rome, furthermore, can lay claim to all of the gods whose temples are gathered together in her landscape.

On the other hand, a surprising amount of variety has been achieved, given the relatively narrow parameters of Roman temple architecture. [41] Each temple features a different number of columns. [42] Two different column orders are included, despite the marked Roman preference for Corinthian in actual architectural practice (especially by the Augustan period). [43] The patterns of molding, while broadly similar, nevertheless are not blandly identical. [44] This sort of visual variation is in keeping with the reliefs' function as part of a decorative frieze. As Brunhild Ridgway described in her influential article on the development of sculpted friezes, such friezes require variation within their inherent repetition in order to hold the viewer's interest. This variation within the depictions, furthermore, encourages the impression of divine abundance and multiplicity.

The fact that three different temple sizes are represented seems unlikely to be coincidental. As we have seen, there is a general lack of concern in Roman art for accuracy in column number, with different representations of the same historical temple featuring different numbers of columns. Thus on the Valle-Medici Reliefs column number could have been manipulated easily for the sake of variety, without doing injury to the identity of the depiction. The same can be said for column order. [45] Column order, like column number, was not applied stringently in architectural depictions. The particular collection of column order in the Valle-Medici Reliefs (two Corinthian temples and one Ionic) is the same found in another later collection of temples on the Anaglypha Reliefs. All this variation in architectural features would heighten the sense of Rome's architectural complexity and richness.

[46] Even without knowing which temples to which gods are represented, furthermore, the three different sets of pedimental sculpture are immediately distinguishable in terms of style. The sculpture of the octastyle temple is rigid, upright, without any action, featuring gods (Mars,

Venus, Fortuna) specifically associated with the ideology of the Roman state. The sculpture of the hexastyle temple also has no action, but is made up of exotic symbols and wild eastern beasts. The sculpture of the tetrastyle temple presents a Hellenistic-style battle scene full of figures with twisting poses. Significantly, the three different cultural spheres evoked by these different pediments—Roman, eastern, and Greek—correspond with three of the main geographic spheres of the empire at the time.

[47] The original monument of the Valle-Medici Reliefs therefore seems to have been replete with depictions of elaborate, luxurious architecture, carefully presented in a way to maximize visual variation. The question then arises if this was an afterthought, or a driving factor in the selection of which buildings to include. If scholars are correct, and the historical buildings represented all have a connection to Augustus, then that certainly must have been a major factor in their selection. But Augustus built and restored dozens of buildings. It seems reasonable to suggest that how particular buildings could be represented visually could have been a factor in deciding which building projects made it onto the Valle-Medici monument.

As we have seen, the three historical temples chosen for illustration on the Valle-Medici altar—the Temple of Mars Ultor, the Temple of Magna Mater, and whatever historical structure the depicted tetrastyle temple is meant to be—these temples could be represented in a manner that played up the cultural and religious variety those temples brought to the capital city. All of these buildings situated the main action of sacrifice within a very particular landscape: a Rome that was religiously abundant and diverse, architecturally luxurious, and a creation of Augustus.

There are two things to note about this message and the means by which it was conveyed. The first is that although complex, this message could be conveyed succinctly and with relative ease

in visual form. The second is that this message could be grasped by a viewer with a basic familiarity of broad artistic styles and the religious architecture of Rome, rather than requiring that viewer to know specific details such as the foundation dates of various temples. The viewer would also not be required to read, either in terms of ability or time. The Valle-Medici Reliefs, after all, present in illustrated form the same message delivered by the inscribed *Res Gestae* of the Ara Pacis.

This package, a dynastic message with a neat visual delivery system, was probably not a random byproduct of selecting temples by other criteria. Instead it may have been the driving force behind which temples were chosen for inclusion on the monument in the first place. Faced with a plethora of Augustan building projects, the production team may have actively selected temples that could be identified easily and combined into a coherent politicized visual program. Whether or not those particular temples were ever the scenes of actual sacrifices on the same day or occasion was probably immaterial. Just as the procession scenes of the Ara Pacis could represent an idealized, rather than historical, combination of individuals, so too the series of sacrifices on the Valle-Medici altar could represent broad idealized piety, rather than a documentary of actual events.

In doing all this the production team of the Valle-Medici monument was taking the architectural program of Augustus and adapting it to a new, purely visual medium. His successors were thus embracing and expanding Augustus' politicized architectural program and using it for their own, now dynastic ends. Augustus had expanded Rome's religious pantheon, and now subsequent generations were laying claim to that same religious expansion but celebrating it in their own monuments.

[48] A caveat: all of the patterns I've demonstrated so far could be augmented—or undermined—if the original Valle-Medici altar included additional architectural depictions. Unfortunately we have little information on this question. [49] In 1994 Eugenio La Rocca proposed that seven other fragments with architectural depictions, discovered in excavations at the foot of the Capitoline Hill, may belong to the same monument as the Valle-Medici Reliefs, based on striking similarities in style and execution. Several of these fragments feature architectural elements notably similar to those shown on the Valle-Medici Reliefs. However, having just seen some of these reliefs in person in August, I am now skeptical that they could have all come from the same monument. I do believe, however, that they can help us contextualize the Valle Medici architectural depictions.

I was able to locate three fragments in storage in the Museo Capitolini. [50] The largest fragment I was able to see is MC 3345, which shows the bottom part of a circular temple. La Rocca and others have suggested that it represents the Temple of Vesta on the Forum Romanum. [51] Like the depictions of the Valle-Medici Reliefs, the circular temple is exquisitely detailed, including such nice touches as the hinges and bosses on the wooden doors. [52] Like the Valle-Medici depictions, the circular temple is shown frontally, but slightly angled to the background. Like the Valle-Medici depictions, attention is drawn to the podium and the decorated door. But the circular temple is much smaller than the Valle Medici depictions: the octastyle and hexastyle temples are both around 1.5 m high, while the circular temple fragment is only 46 cm high. If we estimate that 2/3 of the original height of the depiction is preserved, that would make it only about 60 cm high, barely half the height of the octastyle temple. Even if we imagine that the production team was maintaining some sort of scale, with the Temple of Vesta smaller than the

Temple of Mars Ultor, it is hard to imagine how the smaller temple would have been integrated into the composition.

[53] Further evidence arguing against a single monument comes from MC 3346, which shows the roof of a round structure, with overlapping petal shingles, a decorated sima, and elaborately molded architraves. [54] This, however, cannot be the same structure as MC 3345: [55] enough of the background relief is preserved for each fragment to show that the roof did not meet the background at the same angle as the lower colonnade. We thus have the remains of two different elaborate depictions of round structures. Given the paucity of well-known round structures in Rome, and the small size of the depictions, it is unlikely that both can be integrated into the same monument as the Valle-Medici Reliefs.

I think it is safer to see the Capitoline fragments as a reminder that there were probably numerous high quality relief monuments with detailed depictions of architecture, not all of which have been preserved. The other fragments published by La Rocca support this theory. [56] MC 3350 consists of six podium steps crowned by a column base, with just enough preserved to recall the podia of the Valle-Medici temples. [57] I was not able to locate the four remaining fragments published by La Rocca, but one seems to represent a wall and a *corona civica*, probably a reference to the Palatine House of Augustus. Another fragment shows part of a gabled tile roof, a decorated sima, and a hint of pedimental sculpture. These last two fragments probably represent identifiable buildings, and cannot belong to either fragment depicting a circular structure, although they could line up with the podium steps. [58] So at a minimum we have evidence for 3, probably 4 different depicted structures. All of these fragments are undated, but the craftsmanship of the pieces that I have seen is very similar to that of the Valle-Medici temples, so...there's that.

We should expect to find evidence of more monuments with architectural depictions, since such depictions would eventually become all pervasive in Roman monumental reliefs. As things stand, however, the Valle-Medici Reliefs are our earliest major monument from Rome to make extensive use of architectural depictions. Examining the historical context in which the reliefs were produced can help us better understand their use of architectural depictions, and also add further evidence that the buildings were not just background filler, but an integral part of the monument's themes and impact.

[59] Architectural depictions in Roman monumental reliefs can be divided up into two main periods: before Trajan, and after that. The Valle-Medici Reliefs exemplify major trends for architectural depictions in monumental reliefs before the Trajanic period. The main feature of this period was an emphasis on elaborate, luxurious, permanent architecture. A secondary feature, however, was a tendency to depict specific, identifiable buildings, either real or theoretical. Both of these trends worked together to reflect changes in the social and architectural topography of Rome.

[60] The first full architectural depictions to appear in Roman monumental reliefs can be found on the Basilica Aemilia Reliefs. The exact date of the Basilica Aemilia Frieze is debated, but it is almost certainly late Republican or early Augustan. The frieze included at least two architectural depictions: a wall behind a horse, and a scene where men construct a stone fortification to illustrate the founding of a city. The wall of the fortification is comically small compared to the workmen, and the men are lifting what presumably are meant to be stone blocks in place by hand. [61] This scene type—where men move blocks in place by hand while a city

goddess watches—is also found on the painted Esquiline frieze, and seems to represent a stock composition; similar scenes would repeat on the Column of Trajan over a century later. [62] On the Basilica Aemilia Frieze the incomplete wall already has in place an arched gate, as well as a tower with arched windows and merlons. This particular configuration emphasizes that, despite the apparent assault on logic, the wall is meant to be made of stone, and as such is a permanent, impressive feature. The Basilica Aemilia Frieze thus represents an early stage in the use of depicted architecture in Roman monumental reliefs. The building represents a specific identifiable structure, but a pseudo-historical one, and it is identifiable only through the narrative, rather than some particular illustrated feature. The illustrated fortification also introduces the concept of representing architecture in a way that is more concerned with symbolism than logic or accuracy. Specifically, part of the visual embodiment of Rome's foundational culture is through her architecture, which is permanent and technologically advanced.

[63] This trend continues on perhaps the most famous Augustan monument, in the temple in the so-called Aeneas Panel of the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, most often identified as the Temple of the Penates at Lavinium. Like the temples of the Valle-Medici Reliefs, the temple on the Ara Pacis has a strong emphasis on the façade, which is open to reveal the cult statues. [64] The Ara Pacis temple shares several features with its Valle-Medici brethren, such as elaborate molding, the Corinthian order, pedimental statuary, acroteria, a tile roof, and ashlar masonry. While all these features could be expected for a temple in the imperial period, they do not seem in keeping with a building representing the earliest history of Rome. Instead of reflecting (pseudo)-historical accuracy, these features carry the new Augustan architectural splendor into the ancient past, drawing another line of connection between Augustus and early Rome. Like the Basilica Aemilia

Frieze, the Ara Pacis presents a consciously recreated past where the Roman world was always architecturally sophisticated.

Also similar to the Basilicae Aemilia Frieze, the Ara Pacis shrine represents a particular structure, but a mythological one. On the Valle-Medici Reliefs, the temples represented would be actual temples in Rome with defined histories and real facades that could be seen and recognized by anyone visiting the city. Why did this important change occur?

By the time of the Valle-Medici Reliefs, the practice of depicting historical temples was well established in Rome, but in a different medium: coins. [65] The first representation of a built structure appeared on *denarii* of 135 B.C.E. By the end of the Republic, architectural types were a common tool in the moneyer's kit. Nathan Elkins has pointed out that such types first emerged and flourished in the context of increasing political and social competition among elite families in the capital. He notes that architectural types generally were part of a more elaborate visual numismatic program honoring a moneyer's ancestor. For example, the famous coins struck in 58 B.C.E. by Marcus Aemilius Lepidus that featured a building (either the Basilica or Porticus Aemilia) were part of a series honoring the moneyer's illustrious ancestor; the series included a reference to a statue, erected for bravery in battle, and an illustration of the hero taking on the guardianship of Ptolemy V.

[66] The Valle-Medici Reliefs seem to take a similar approach to architectural depictions, employing them within the burgeoning medium of monumental reliefs. Like the numismatic representations, the depicted temples of the Valle-Medici Reliefs reference past architectural achievements of the honoree's ancestor. Two temples are presented in nearly frontal three-quarter view, as on many coins, and are identified in part through elaborate statuary. The Valle-

Medici Reliefs thus wed an Augustan tradition of using architectural depictions in monumental reliefs to call attention to Rome's architectural sophistication, with a numismatic tradition of dynastic eulogizing through ancestral architecture.

It is perhaps not coincidence that such depictions of elaborate, dynastically charged buildings appear at nearly the same time that the senate was losing the prerogative of constructing such buildings. After centuries of competing through increasingly opulent public works projects, senatorial families suddenly found such activity primarily monopolized by the imperial family. Depictions of historic structures provided a means by which the senatorial elite could continue to engage with and even actively participate in the dialogue of architectural competition, if only indirectly. Since the earliest extant dedicatory inscriptions of monumental reliefs postdate the Valle-Medici Reliefs, it is difficult to say whether their original monument would have been similarly presented as a gift of the senate (and people) to the emperor. What we do have, however, is a medium that would later be associated with the senate, employing a specific type of politicized semiotics once associated with the senate, at the same time that the senate was being locked out of participating in the political process they were illustrating. The Valle-Medici Reliefs thus may represent an attempt by senatorial interests to maintain a hold on the political capital of public architecture.

Once introduced, this approach had several advantages. I have already pointed out architectural depictions' ability to convey complex information concisely. Going further, the Temple of Mars Ultor could be built only once, and refurbished only so many times. Opportunities to build new structures adjacent to that temple were limited by the availability of space and funds. Ceremonies held in front of that temple were ephemeral and subject to the exigencies of religious practice (in other words, they could only be held on certain days at certain times in certain circumstances, as

dictated by religious tradition). But an illustration of that same Temple of Mars Ultor could be installed on another structure across the city, creating permanent, obvious connections between the two structures and the elites they represented.

The reliefs also presented the opportunity to visually rearrange buildings and draw connections between them that might not be as easily recognized within the architectural chaos of Rome herself. The Temple of Mars Ultor and the Temple of Magna Mater as structures could never be viewed together, or even viewed sequentially without traveling a considerable distance across the city. On the reliefs, in contrast, buildings could be combined at will into meaningful tableaux. No actual temple, furthermore, could ever be viewed completely free of surrounding distractions of nearby buildings, crowds, temporary structures, dirt, noise, weather, or the physical logistics of viewing (a viewer would have to stand rather far away from the Temple of Mars Ultor in order to see the entire façade comfortably, which would in turn make seeing the pedimental statuary in any detail difficult). The temples that appear on the Valle-Medici Reliefs are idealized and somewhat abstracted, semantic representations that are perennially uncluttered and unchanging.

[67] Whatever the precise goals of the Valle-Medici Reliefs, the depictions must have been deemed a success, because the same type of depiction appears on the so-called Hartwig Relief. This relief is commonly thought to derive from the *Templum Gentis Flaviae* and to depict the Temple of Quirinus on the Quirinal Hill. In the depicted temple of this relief, the full pediment recalls those of the Valle-Medici temples, but with even more detailed and sumptuous sculpture. The Hartwig temple also features elaborate molding and details such as worked capitals (in this case Doric/Tuscan), and deeply drafted quadratic masonry. Notably, the number of columns does not match those recorded in antiquity: two sources note that the historical temple was octastyle.

Once again, this representation works on two levels. Firstly, the depiction is clearly identifiable as a temple with dynastic associations, although here the associations appear to be topographic, given that the Quirinal Hill was the site of the Flavian family home. The unnatural scale and narrative of the pedimental statuary not only identifies the temple but allows the sculptural imagery to play a clearer role in the sacrificial tableau than it probably could have on the actual building. Secondly, the depiction situates the current ruler within a particular vision of Rome, one defined by elaborate, expensive, and permanent religious architecture. The localized deity furthers the connection between architecture and capital.

[68] The depicted arch in the Spoil Relief of the Arch of Titus presents a similar picture. The molded decoration here is quite elaborate, including an unusual frieze with rosettes. The pilasters are deeply fluted and the sides of the arch marked with ashlar masonry, an unusual feature for depicted arches. The arch also includes both generalized and specific sculpture. The former category consists of a Victory in the spandrel, and the latter of two *quadrigae* and standing figures crowning the arch. This specific sculpture presumably recalls the shared Judaic triumph of Vespasian and Titus (where the young Domitian would have appeared on foot). Once again, an architectural structure is represented here in great detail, with an emphasis on luxury and permanence. The structure also has specific dynastic connections. What is not clear is whether or not an actual correspondent arch ever existed. Without a better control of the archaeological and topographic record, it is impossible to say.

In the years before Trajan there is a definite trend, then, towards the depiction of elaborate, luxurious buildings, most of which had specific dynastic associations for the ruling family. This can be contrasted with the relative dearth, compared to later periods, of generic buildings.

Another notable feature of pre-Trajanic architectural depictions is that buildings were depicted as

independent entities, rather than as continuous backdrops or cityscapes. Reliefs, furthermore, could do without any depictions of architecture at all. In the collection of reliefs on the Arch of Titus, for example, only a single building is depicted; even the presentation of the emperor in his chariot, a scene with strong topographic and conceptual connections to Rome, does without architecture. Both these trends would change drastically in the Trajanic period, and were probably related to seeing Rome as a collection of dynastically useful buildings, rather than an urban agglomeration.

[69] As we have seen, the purpose of these intricate depictions must move beyond simply specifying the setting of the action, since so many of the details that were carefully included did nothing to identify their depicted building. In one case at least, the Spoil Panel of the Arch of Titus, the inclusion of the arch added no real topographic information at all (a triumph, after all, could only take place in Rome along the Sacra Via). All of the details did work together, however, to locate the action and the monuments within a specific vision of a specific city: Rome, the architecturally rich capital of a growing and glorious empire. There is a conceptual difference, in other words, between making sure a viewer understood that a historical sacrifice took place in front of the Temple of Mars Ultor, and evoking for the viewer the celebrated capital that Augustus had built, of which the Temple of Mars Ultor was but a prime example of architectural magnificence. A depiction's identity need not limit its impact, nor work independently of that impact. The message that was repeated and reiterated throughout all of these monuments was that Rome was a remarkable collection of fantastic architectural wonders.

One must not forget, furthermore, how unique an approach this was. One thing that seems abundantly clear is that no obvious precedent for this use of depicted architecture can be found in Classical or Hellenistic architectural reliefs. This parallels the numismatic record, where

depictions of specific architectural structures on coins appear to be a Roman invention of the late Republican period. The depicted buildings reflect not only a change in artistic conventions, but a change in attitudes toward architecture.

The emergence of architectural depictions in monumental reliefs thus took place in a very specific historical and topographic context. In the first century of the principate, the Senate was seeing huge shifts in its political and social power and identity. These shifts included the loss of one of their main arenas of competition, the construction and refurbishment of buildings in the capital. At the same time, other social classes, namely the army and the increasingly wealthy equestrians, were gaining power. Finally, Rome continued to grow as an architectural and urban capital under the auspices of the imperial family, a new force needing appeasement.

It is not surprising, given this confluence of circumstances, that at this moment the same sorts of buildings that the Senate once wielded as social weapons began to appear on one of the few major media left to them. By illustrating specific buildings built by the imperial family, the Senate could align themselves with that family. A technique once used to praise Senatorial families was adapted to praise the imperial family. More broadly, by presenting Rome as a collection of prestigious buildings, the Senate was maximizing their own cultural importance, as well as augmenting that of the emperor. Only the highest elites in Rome had their names imprinted on buildings. Intentionally or no, early monumental reliefs furthered the impression that the very concept of Rome was connected to a good that traditionally only the Senate or emperor could provide. Here the interests of the emperor and the Senate could neatly align.

It is worth mentioning that this inability to build set the elite of Rome apart from elites in other cities, who still retained the outlet of prestige through architectural munificence. This may

explain in part why architectural depictions do not appear on major monumental reliefs outside of Rome and her environs. Why sculpt a picture of a temple when you could build the actual thing?

[70] To conclude at last. I hope I have shown that the Valle-Medici Reliefs are of great interest to modern scholars beyond what they can tell us about the pedimental sculpture of the Temple of Mars Ultor. From a methodological standpoint, the depicted architecture of the Valle-Medici Reliefs also demonstrates how greater significance can be found in depictions beyond their identification, even for buildings whose identifications are clear. Revealing this significance requires three components: (a) attention to all architectural details, rather than focusing exclusively on those related to a depiction's identification; (b) treating those details as representing conscious choices, rather than inevitable byproducts of "faithfully" representing a historical building; (c) analyzing each representation and its details within the broader context of the monument as a whole, including other architectural depictions.

As you recall, the primary research question surrounding the Valle-Medici Reliefs has been the identification of the monument that originally supported the panels. Unfortunately, my theories move us even farther away from identifying that original monument. If the depicted architecture was not being used to localize and identify a historical act, then logically we cannot use an illustrated historical event as a means of identifying the original relief monument. All of the depicted historical structures we can identify date to the Augustan period or earlier, and thus do not point to any particular heir. Similarly, the broader message of inheriting Augustus' architectural and religious glory would have been useful to any of the Julio-Claudian emperors. As the debate over the hypothesized Ara Pietatis has shown, furthermore, we cannot assume that we know how many monuments under what names were constructed in Rome for any given

period. The field of potential candidate monuments is thus unknown, the message of the monument is broad, and there are no firm chronological controls preserved that we can identify within the iconography itself.

In the end, the original monument of the Valle-Medici Reliefs must remain a mystery, and indeed the reliefs can tell us little specifically about the topography of Julio-Claudian Rome. But they can tell us a great deal about a burgeoning new approach to the conceptualization and politicized use of architecture within the capital. Rather than simply building buildings, elites were now choosing to illustrate those buildings, thus expanding their impact. Specifically, they were combining architectural projects with the flourishing medium of monumental reliefs—which were, of course, mounted on and contextualized by further buildings.

The Valle-Medici Reliefs thus represent a new approach to celebrating and creating social, political, and cultural capital out of architecture and art. Both the major public buildings and the monumental reliefs they supported and appeared on were media controlled primarily by the same social class. It makes sense that the reliefs were a means of augmenting and amplifying the message projected by the architecture itself: that the architecture built exclusively by the elite class was something to be celebrated. The specific message concerning architecture seen in the Valle-Medici Reliefs, furthermore, is one that will be repeated throughout the history of architectural depictions in monumental reliefs. Rome is presented as somehow defined by her architecture.



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*All Religions in Rome: Architectural
Depictions, the Valle-Medici Reliefs,
and the Creation of a Cosmopolis*

- “...background facades such as these...serve to **identify the foreground event**” (p. 447)
 - F. Albertson. 1987. “An Augustan Temple Represented on a Historical Relief Dating to the Time of Claudius” *AJA* 91: 441-58
- “...the action is perfectly localized by the introduction of **topographic symbols**, represented by the temple structures, **sculptured with great care so that they may easily be recognized**” (p. 72)
 - M. Torelli. 1982. *Typology and Structure of Roman Historical Reliefs*. Jerome Lectures 14. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

My Talk Today

1. Representation of Architecture
2. Significance of Architecture
3. Contextualization

Monumental Reliefs

- Large-scale sculptures in relief, set up in publically accessible space, by groups or individuals acting in the capacity of official positions of authority.
- Once known as “historical” or “state” reliefs

SENATVS
POPVLVSQVE ROMANVS
DIVO TITO DIVI VESPASIANI
F VESPASIANO AVGVS TO



The Temples of the Valle-Medici
Reliefs: Representation

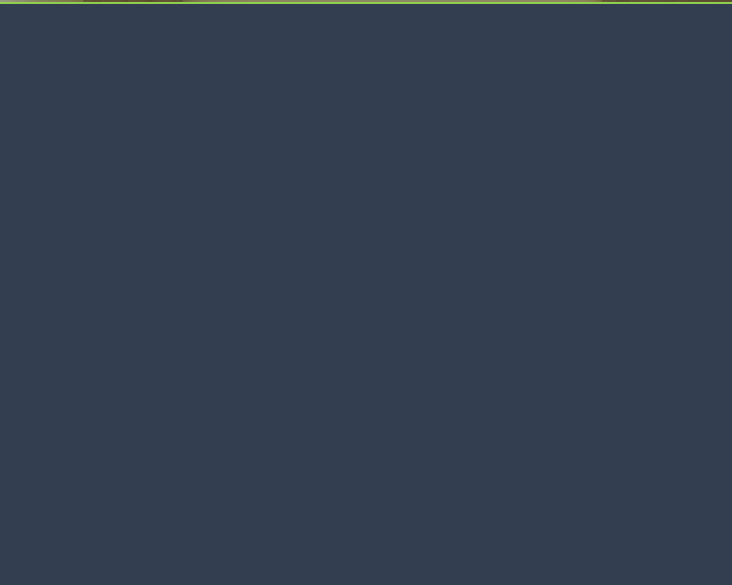




Reconstruction of Ara Pacis
(Museo dell'Ara Pacis)

Reconstruction of Valle-Medici altar
(P. Rehak, Museo dell'Ara Pacis)







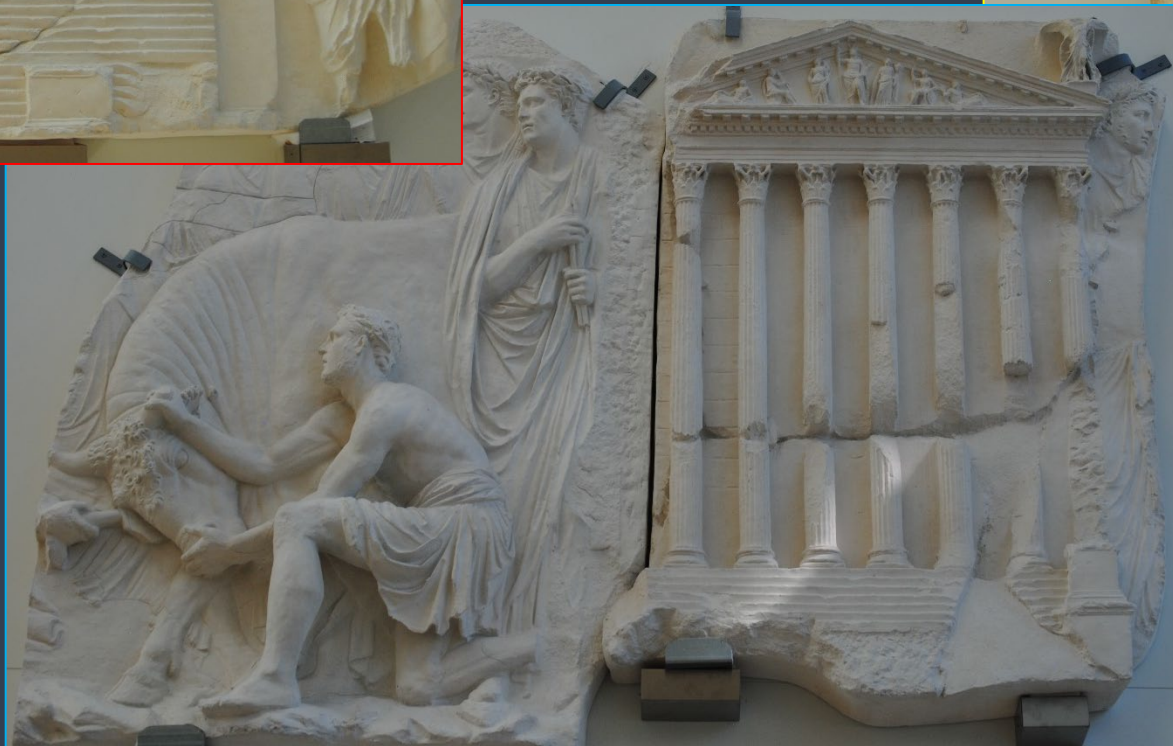
Villa Medici (Rome)

Octastyle Temple
(Garden Façade, Villa Medici)





Hexastyle Temple
(Garden Façade, Villa Medici)



Octastyle Temple



Octastyle Temple





Octastyle Temple

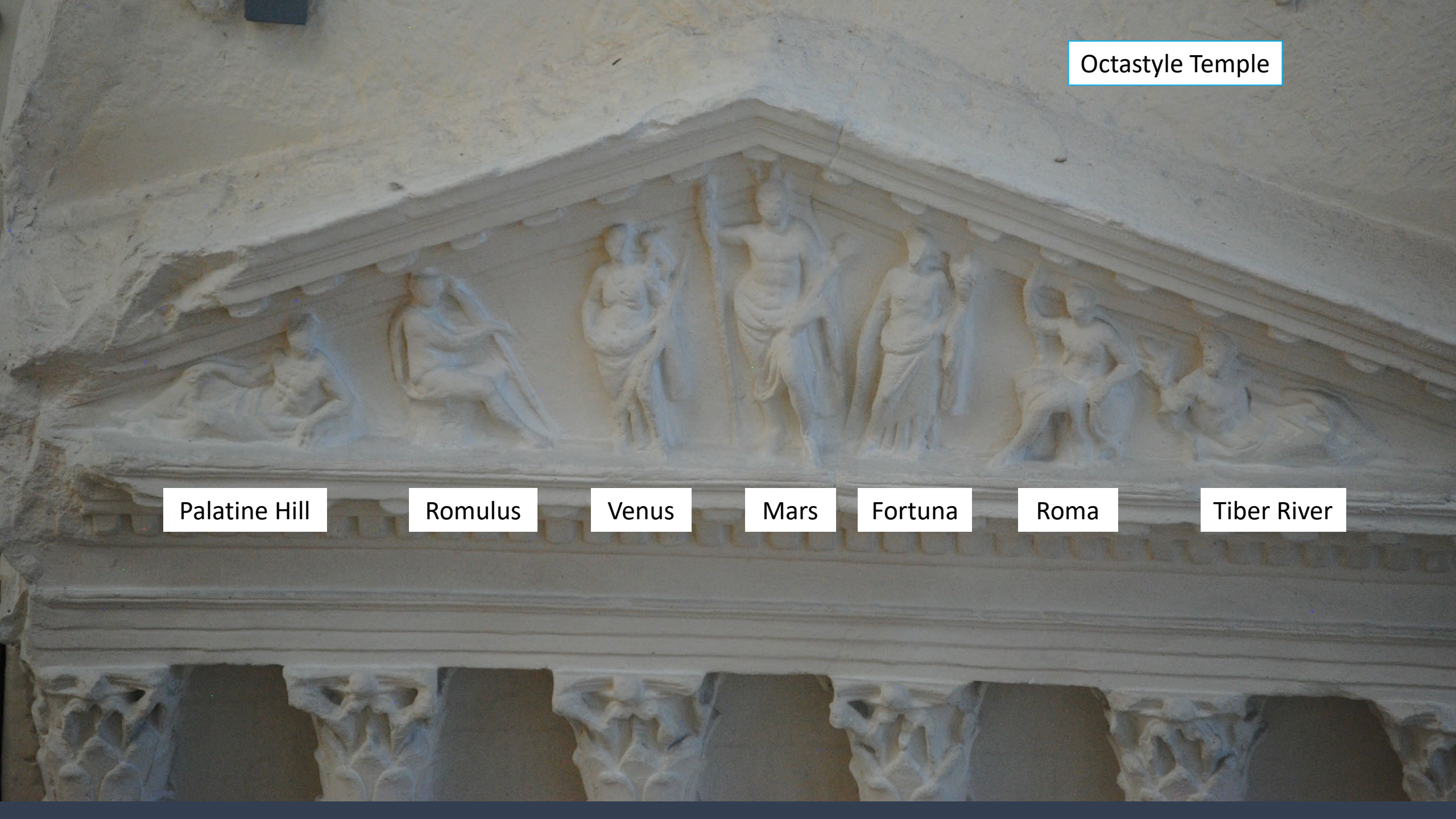


Octastyle Temple

Octastyle Temple



Octastyle Temple



Palatine Hill

Romulus

Venus

Mars

Fortuna

Roma

Tiber River

Octastyle Temple



Hexastyle Temple





Hexastyle Temple

Hexastyle Temple



Hexastyle Temple



Hexastyle Temple



Hexastyle Temple



Tetrastyle Temple



Tetrastyle Temple



Tetrastyle Temple



on templo ionico
o
inense
il Corso (1923)

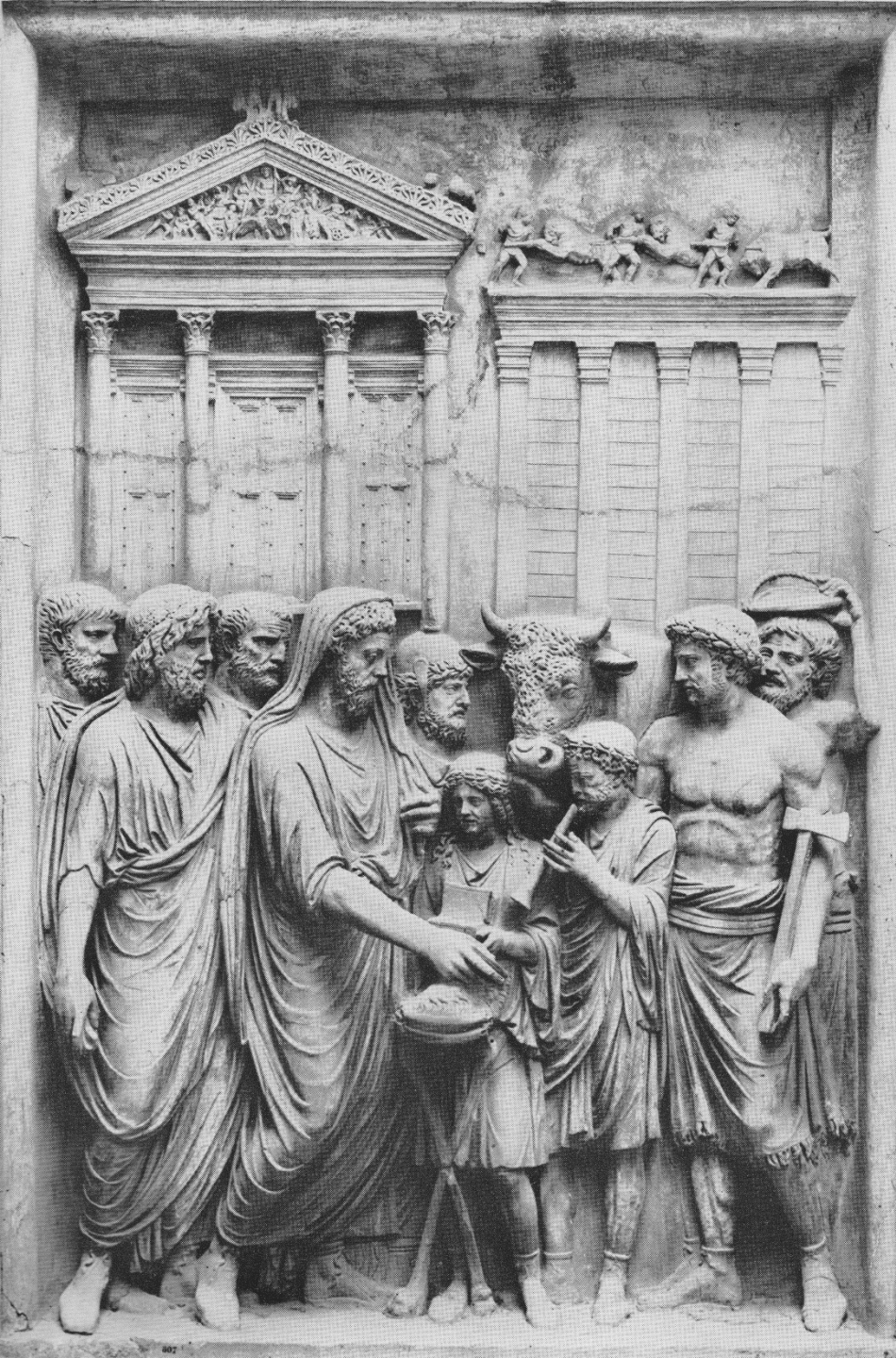
with Ionic temple with

Tetrastyle Temple

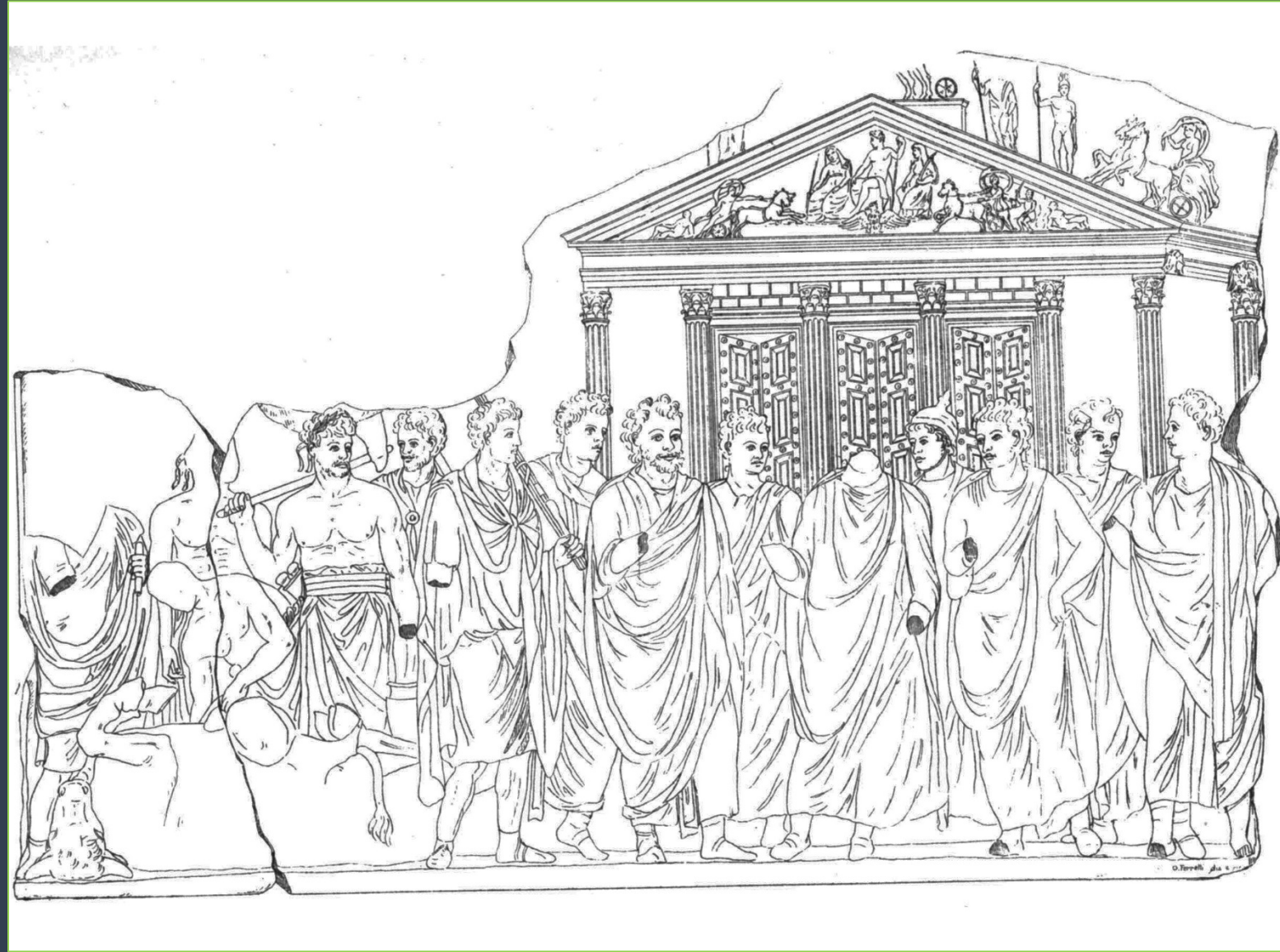


The Temples of the Valle-Medici
Reliefs: Significance

Ancient Depictions of Capitoline Temple

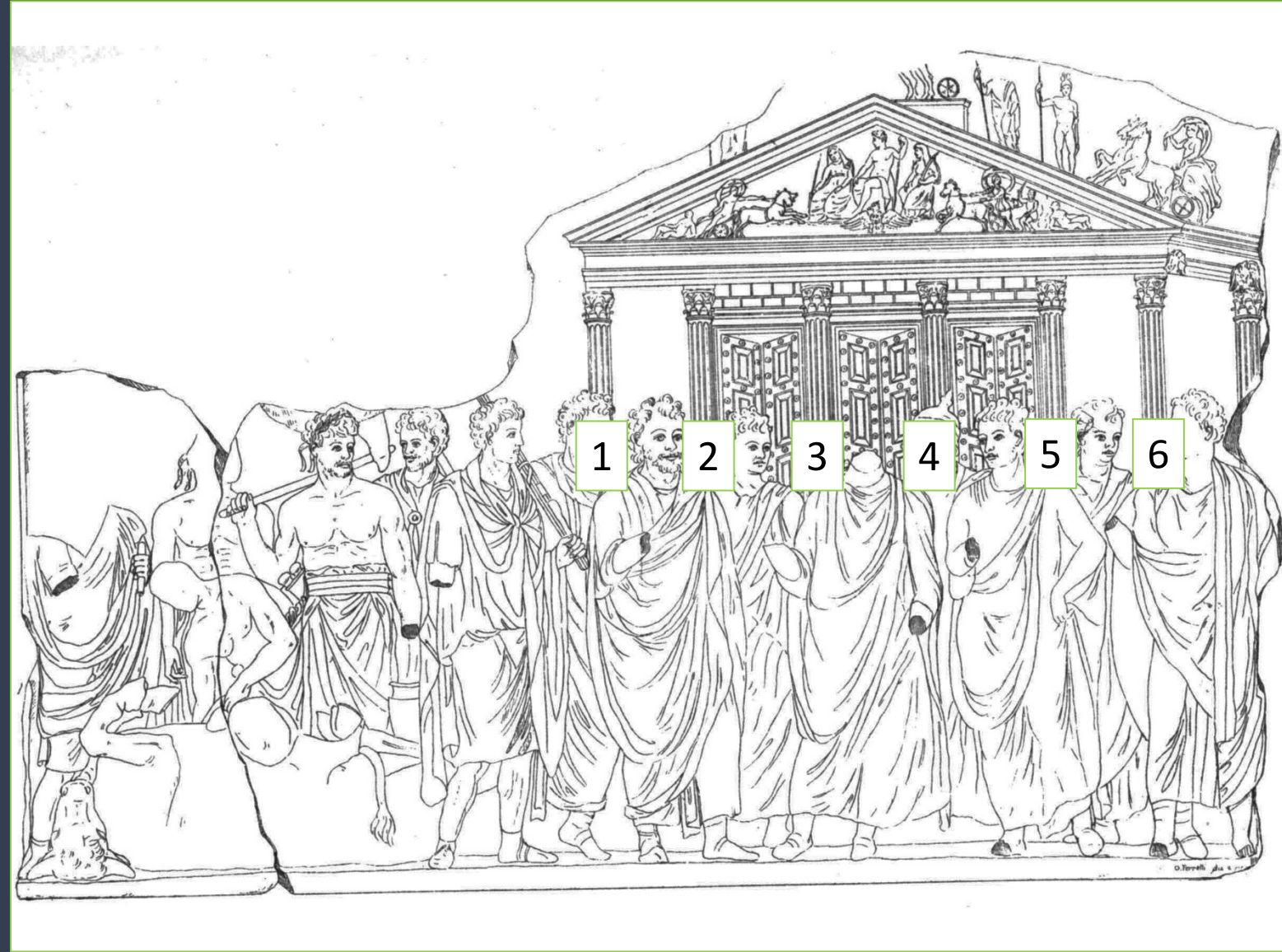


Marcus Aurelius Sacrifice Panel
(Ryberg 1967: fig. 14a)



Reconstruction of Extispicium Relief
(Wace 1907: pl. XXIX)

Ancient Depictions of Capitoline Temple



Marcus Aurelius Sacrifice Panel
(Ryberg 1967: fig. 14a)

Reconstruction of Extispicium Relief
(Wace 1907: pl. XXIX)

Octastyle Temple



Hexastyle Temple



Octastyle Temple





Neoattic Votive Relief from the
Horti Maecenatiani, Rome
(M.C. 1426)





Since the city was not adorned as the dignity of the empire demanded, and was exposed to flood and fire, he so beautified it that he could justly boast that he had found it built of brick and left it in marble.

Suetonius Aug. 28

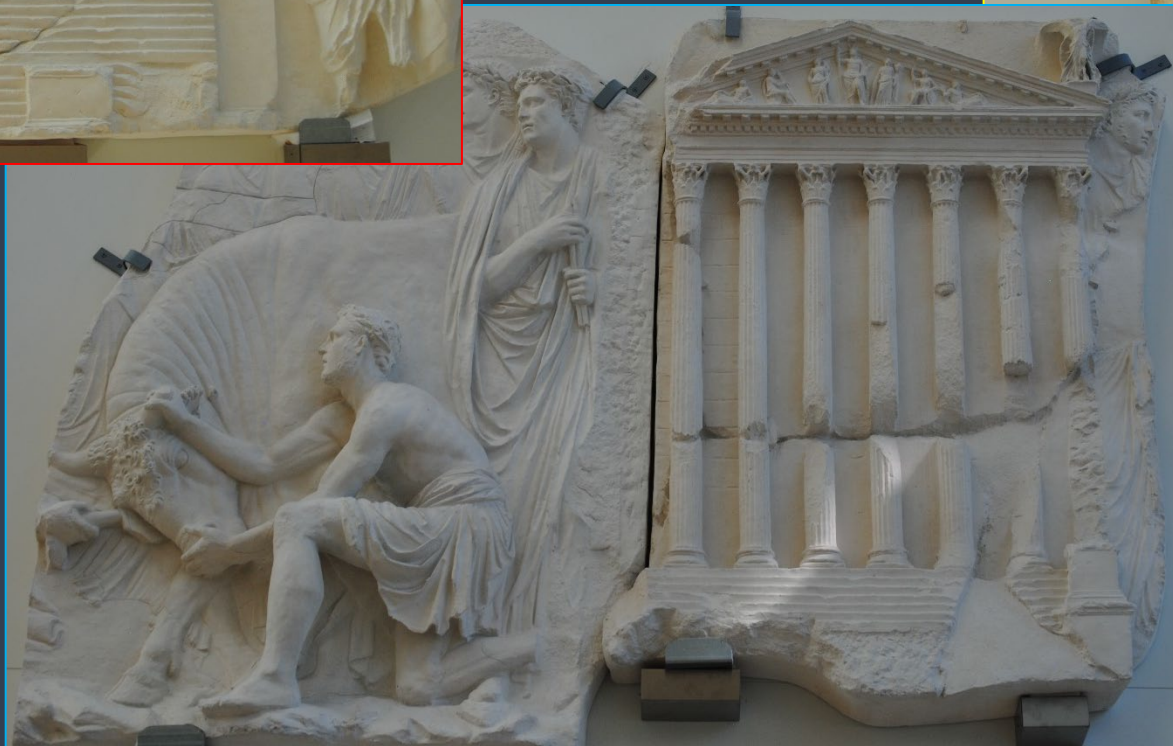
Octastyle Temple

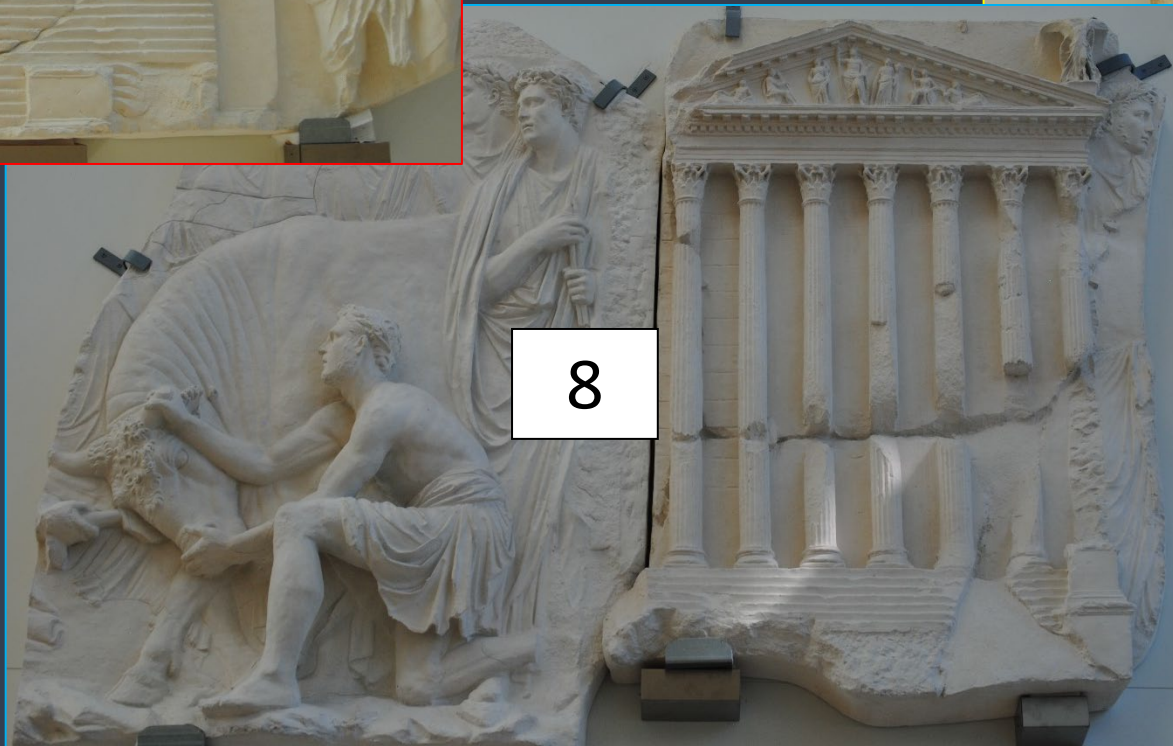
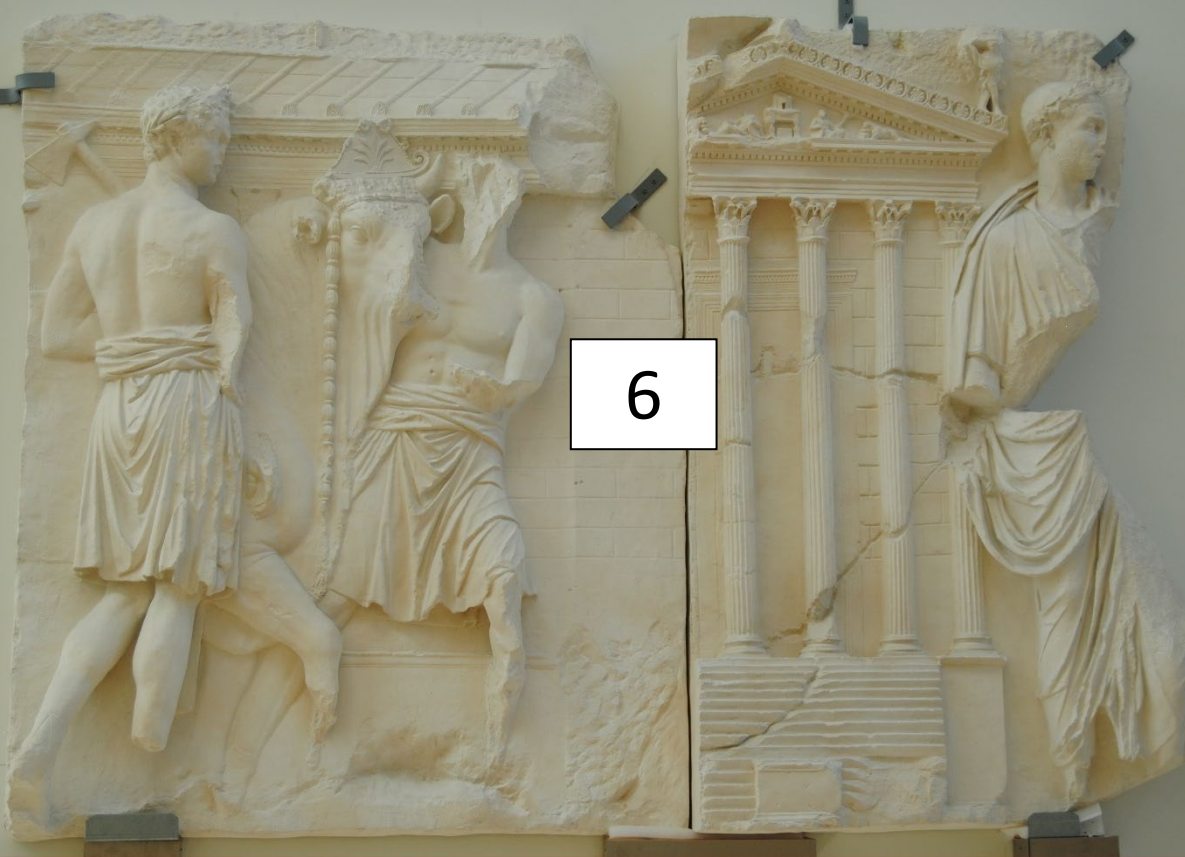


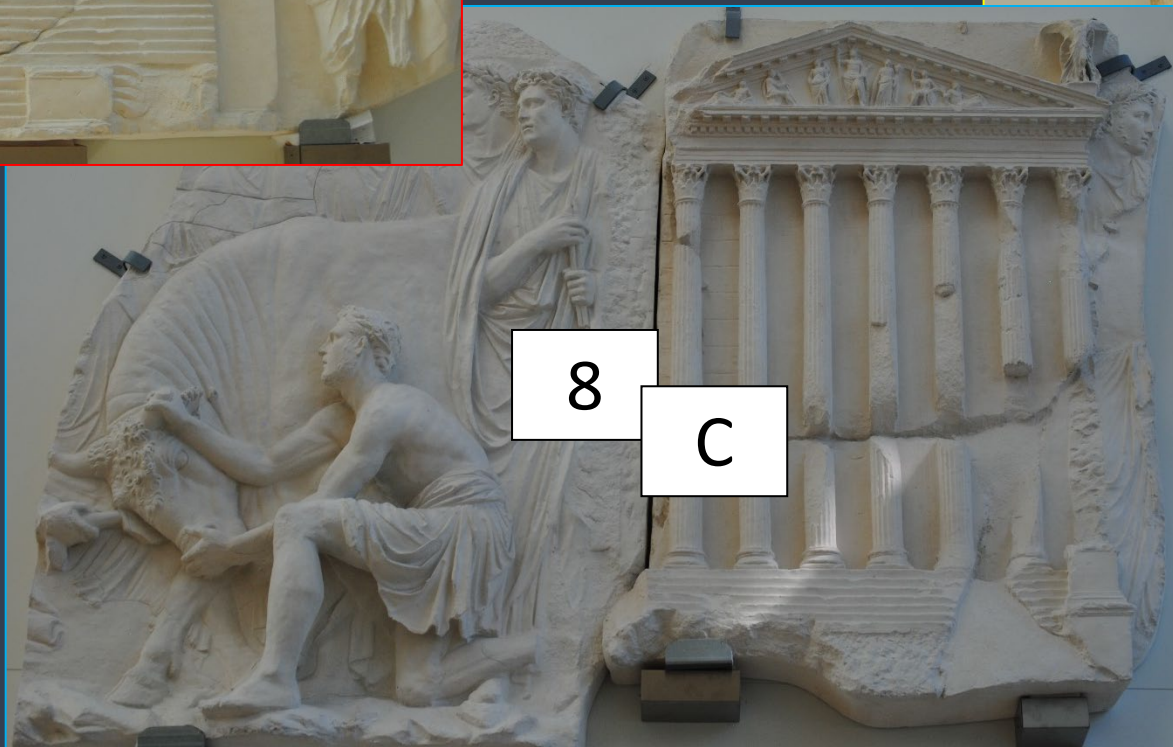
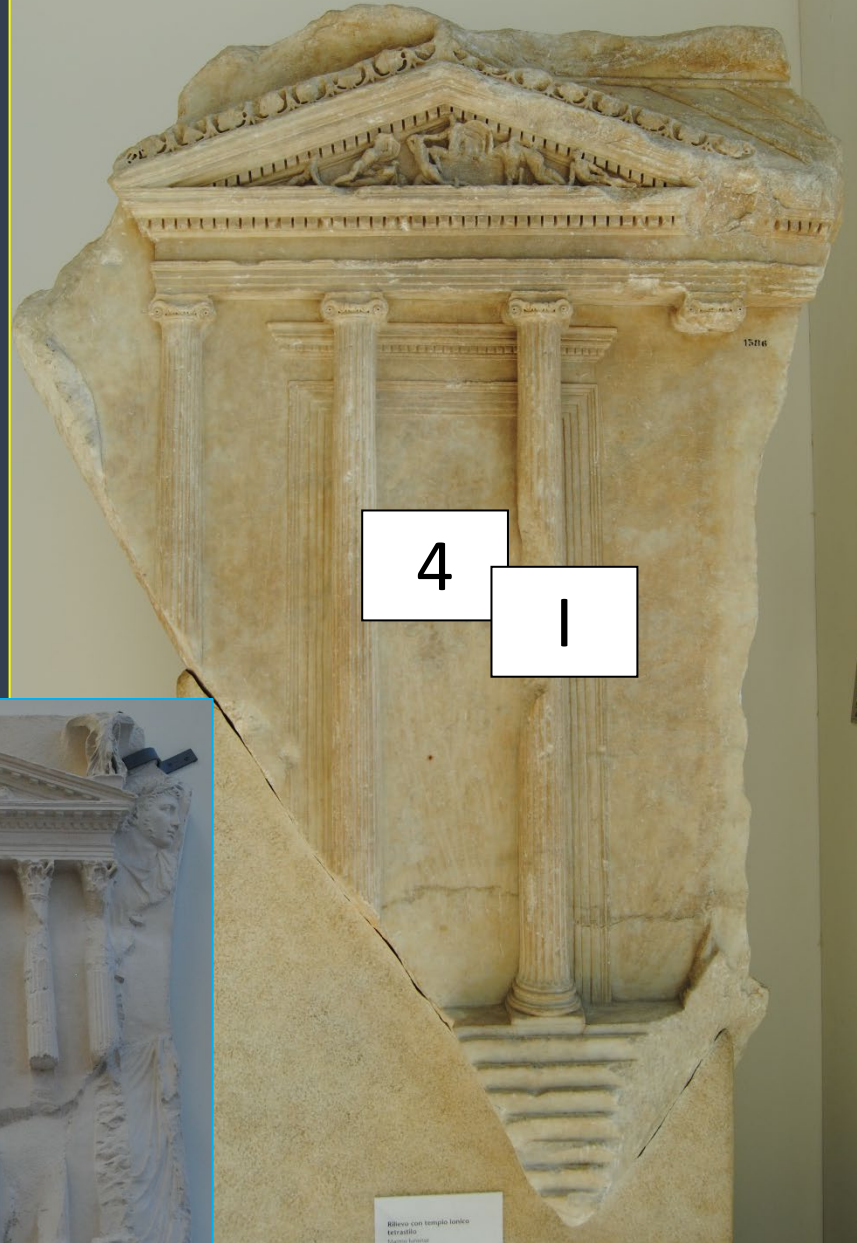
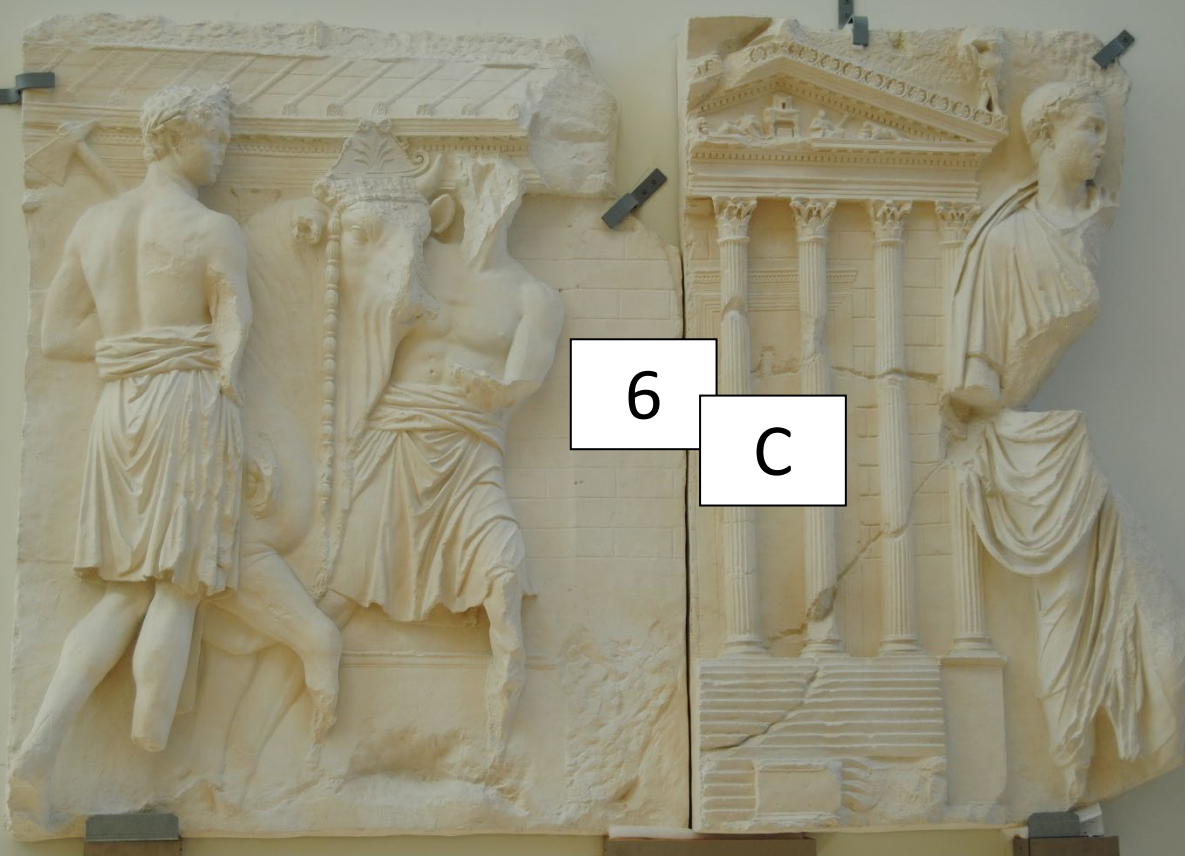
Tetrastyle Temple



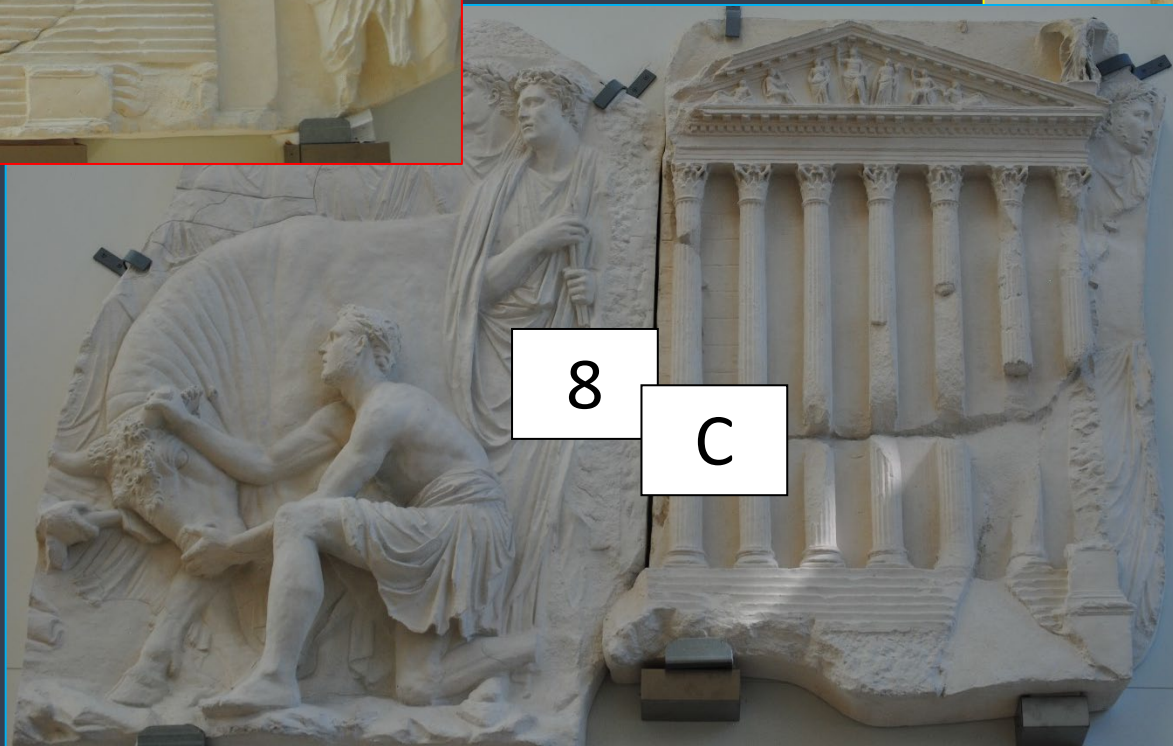
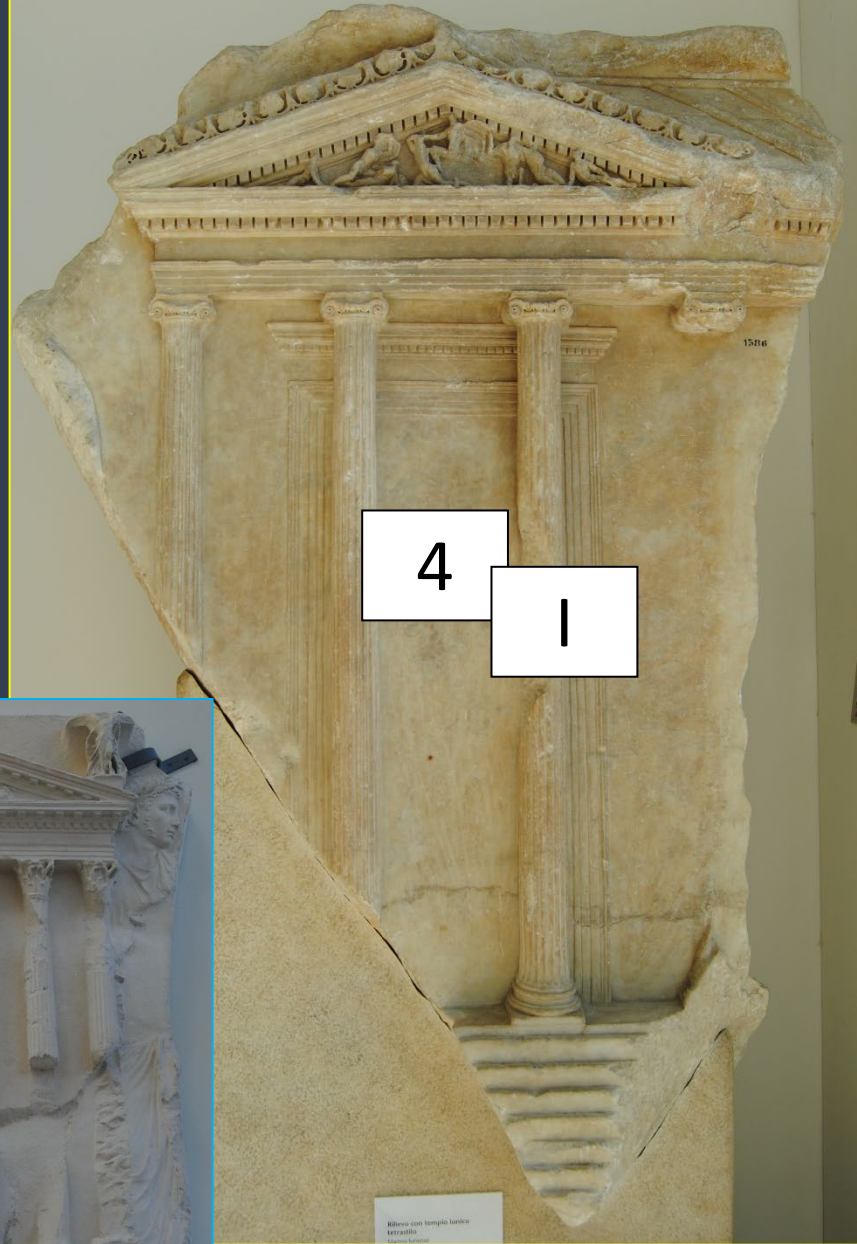
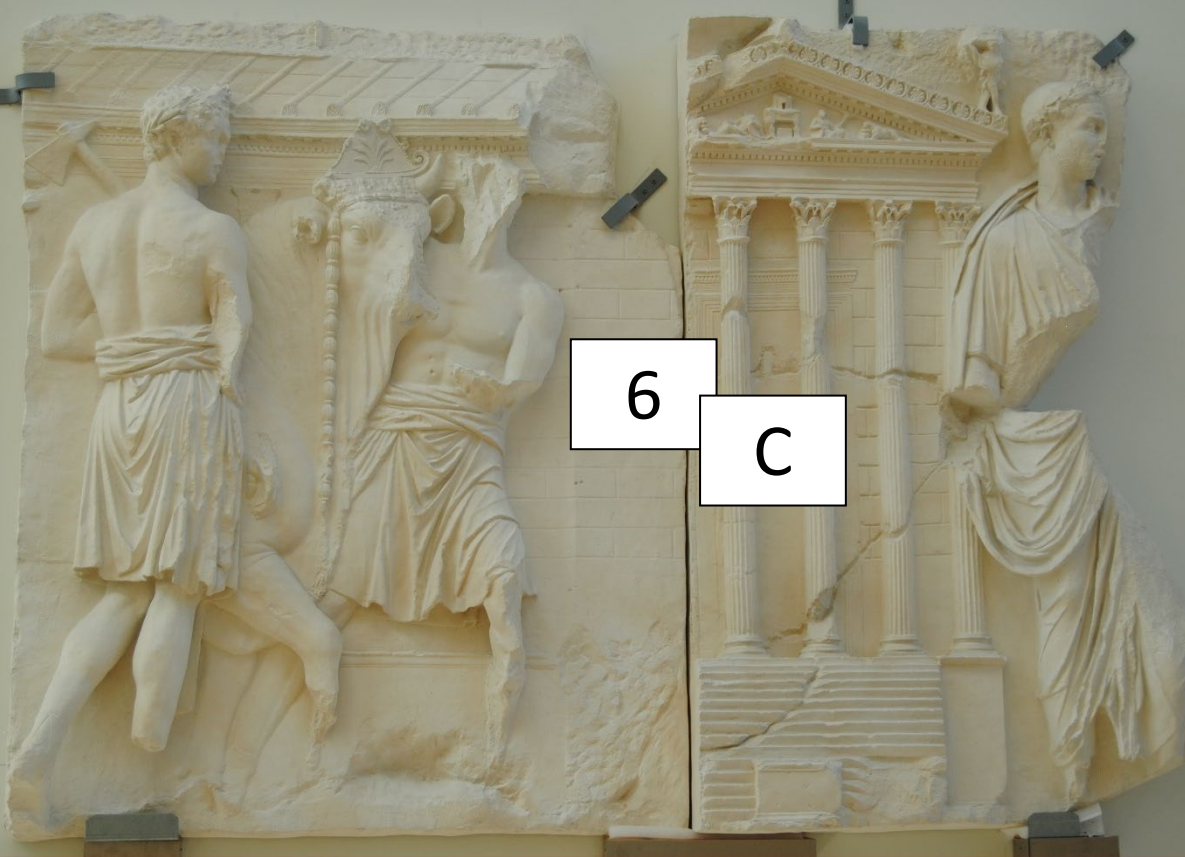
Hexastyle Temple









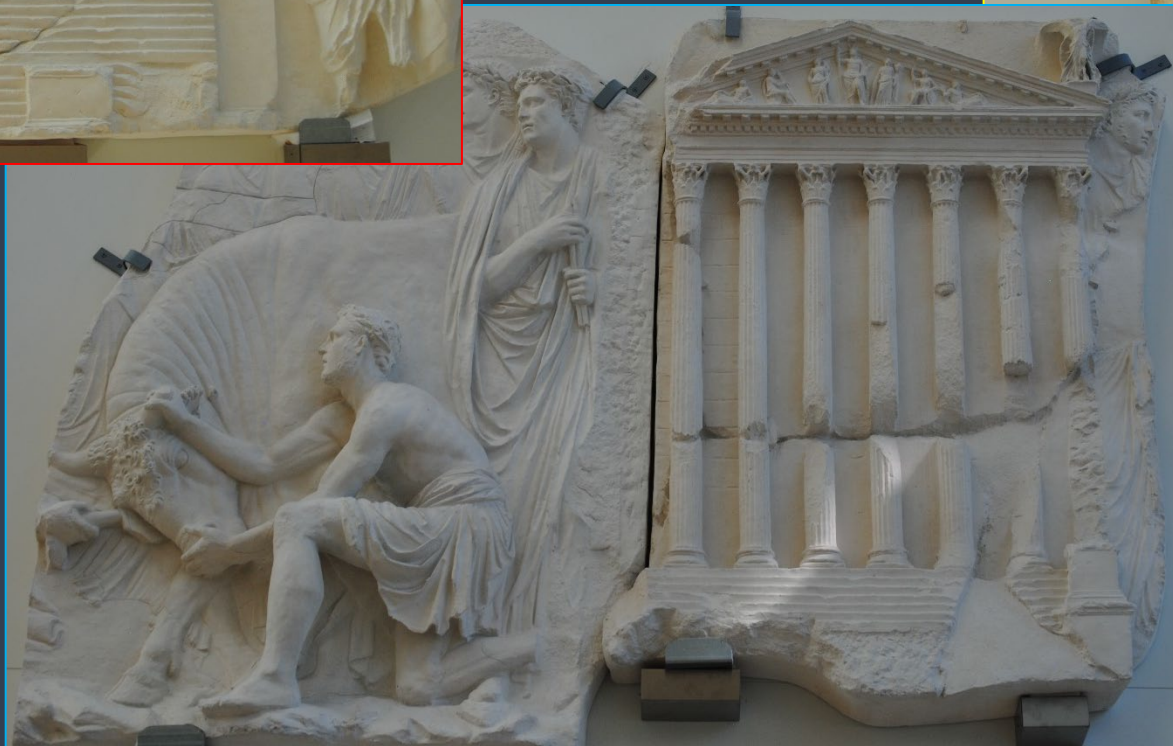




Temples on the Anaglypha Reliefs (Rome)



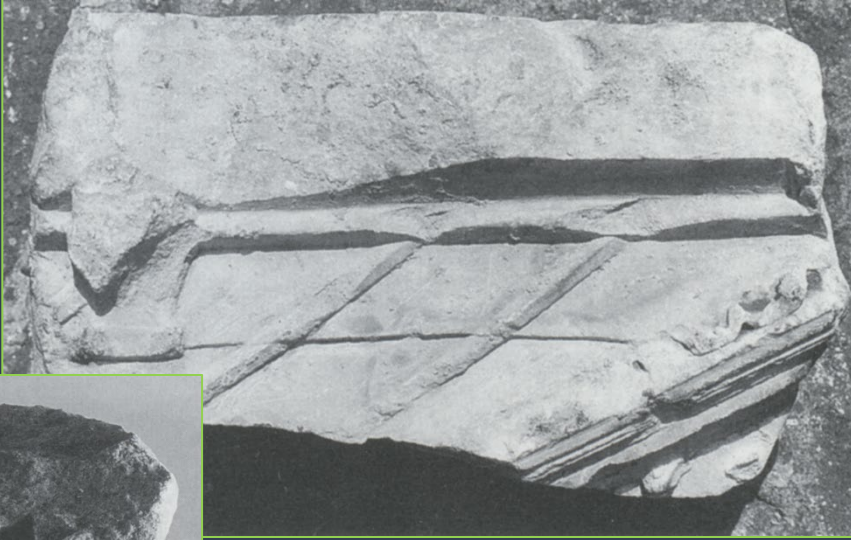




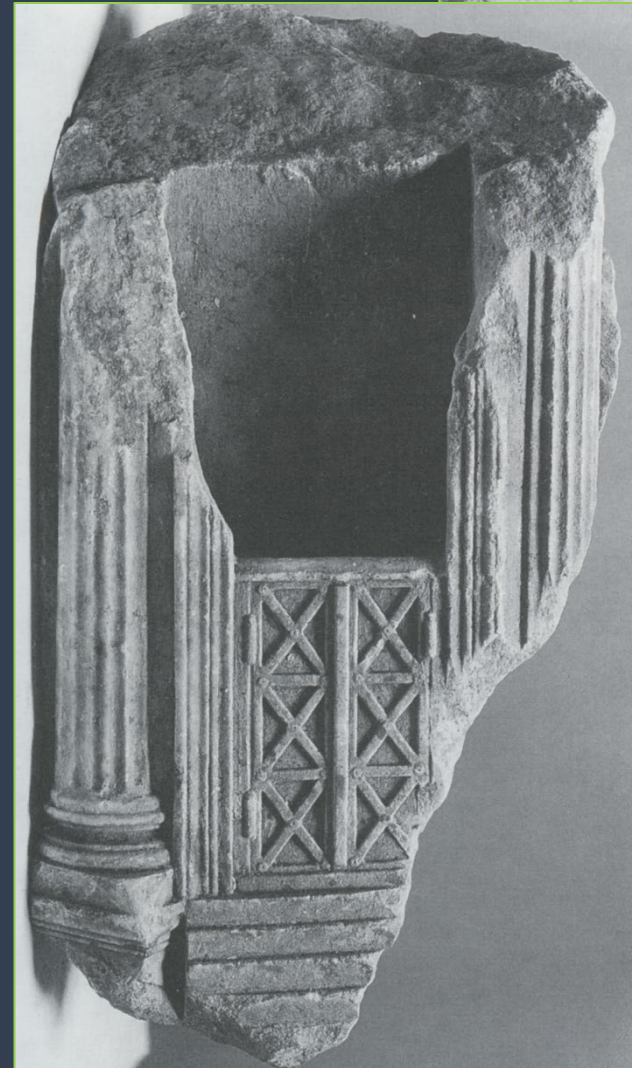
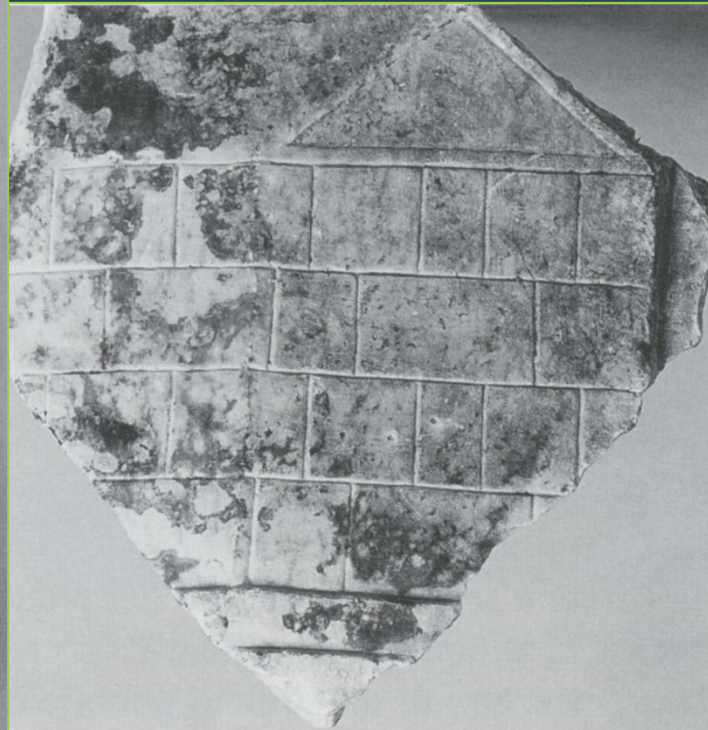
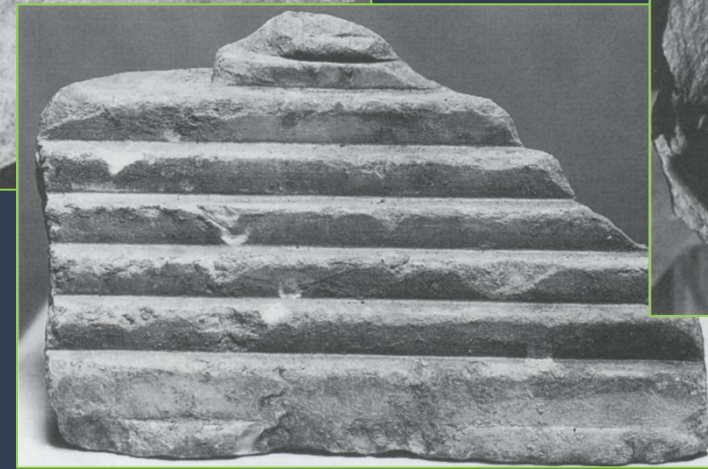


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Fragments associated with Valle-Medici altar (La Rocca 1994)





Fragment of
Circular Temple Colonnade
(M.C. 3345, published as
La Rocca 1994, no. 1 fig. 19)





Fragment of
Circular Temple Colonnade
(M.C. 3345, published as
La Rocca 1994, no. 1 fig. 19)



Fragment of
Circular Temple Roof
(M.C. 3346, published as
La Rocca 1994, no. 1 fig. 18)



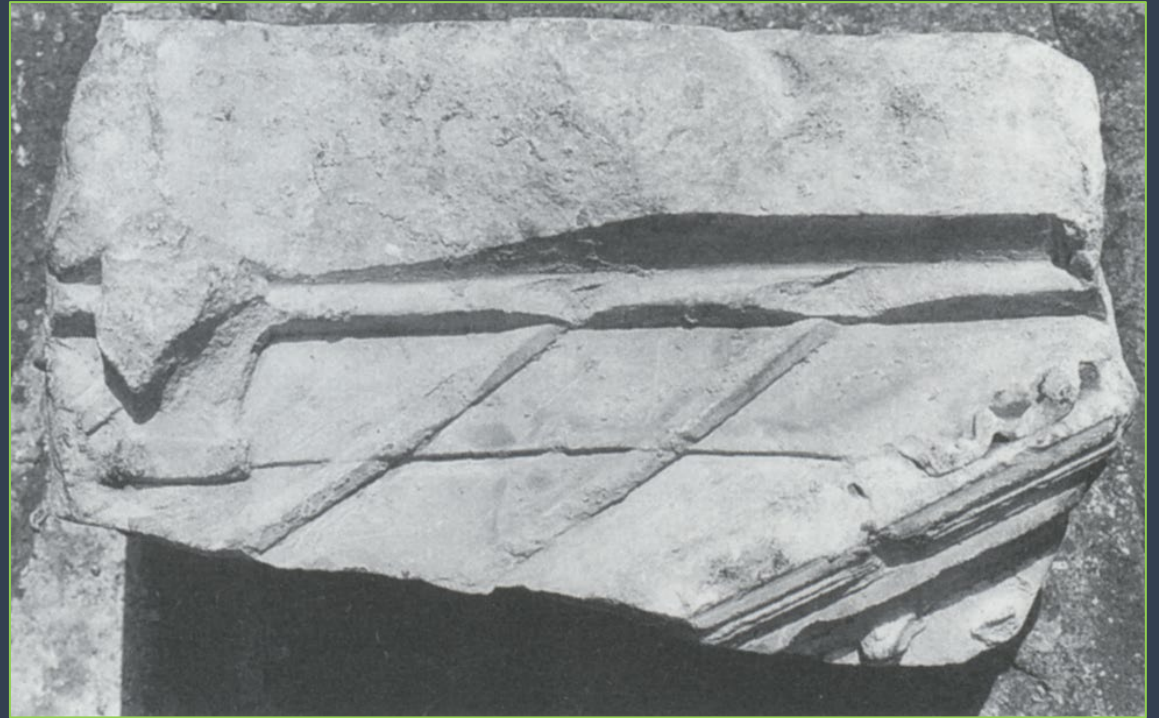




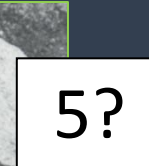
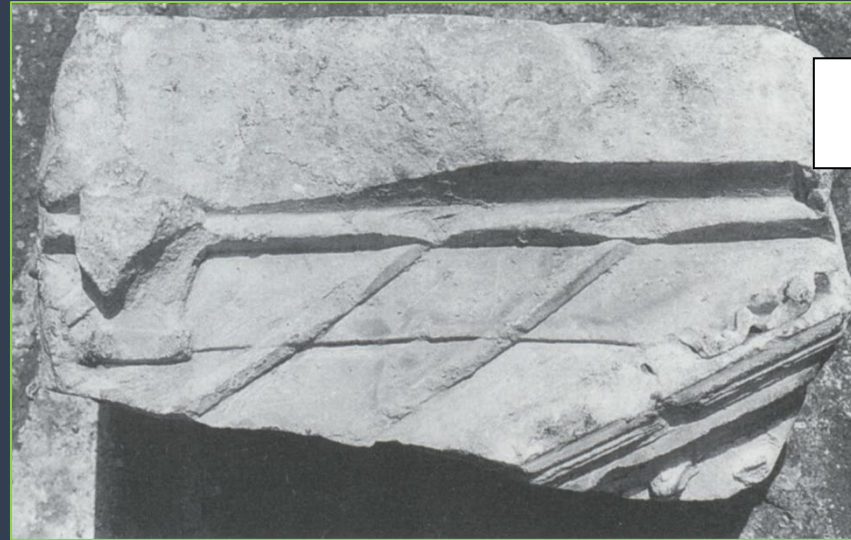
Fragment of
Temple Podium
(M.C. 3350, published as
La Rocca 1994, no. 2 fig. 24)



Fragment of Ashlar Wall with *Corona Civica*?
(La Rocca 1994, no. 3 fig. 22)



Fragment of Temple Roof
(La Rocca 1994, no. 6 fig. 20)



The Temples of the Valle-Medici
Reliefs: Context



Basilica Aemilia Frieze: City Foundation

Painted Frieze from the Esquiline Hill: City Foundation



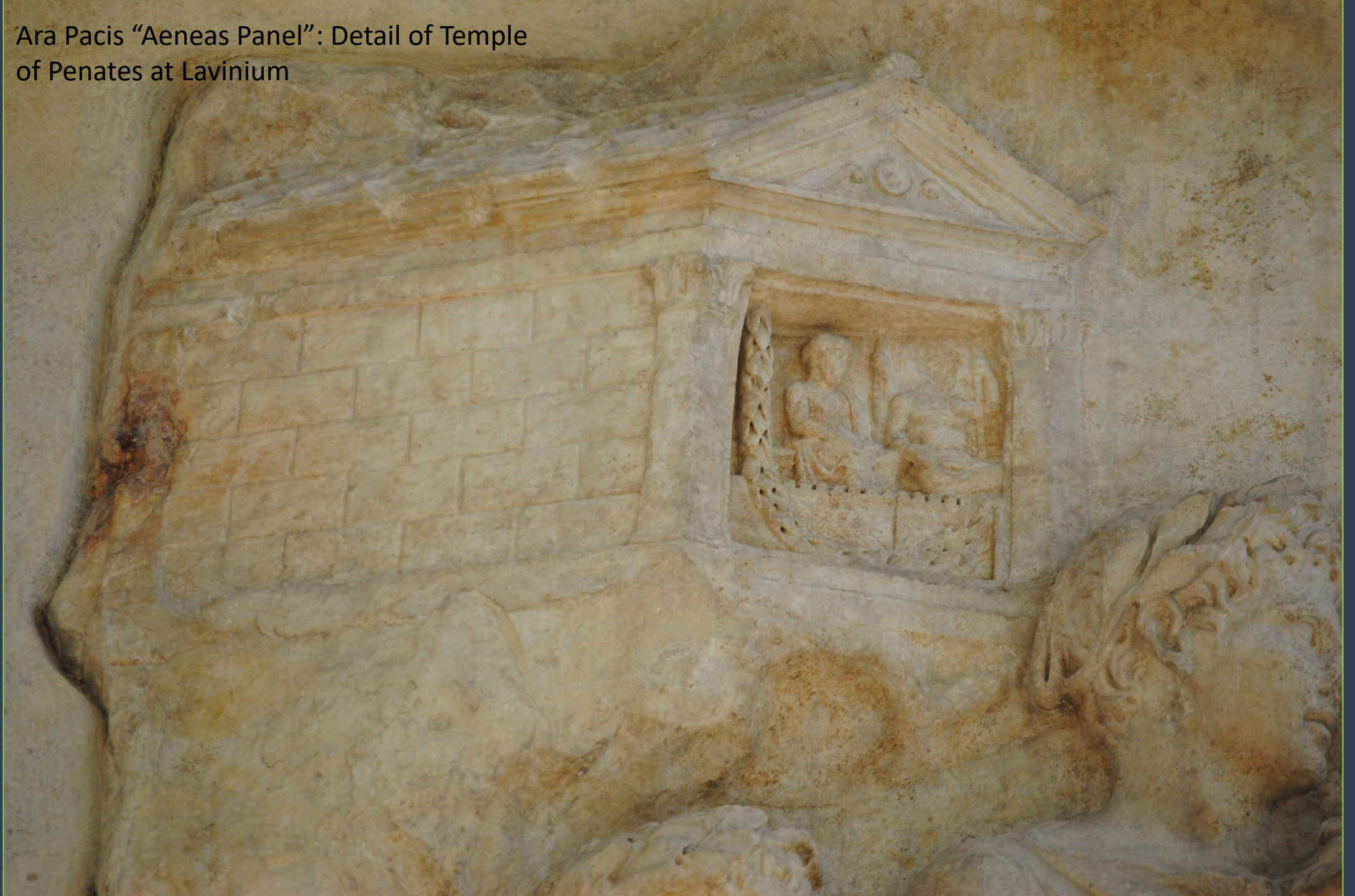


Basilica Aemilia Frieze: City Foundation

Ara Pacis "Aeneas Panel"



Ara Pacis "Aeneas Panel": Detail of Temple
of Penates at Lavinium





RRC 243/1
ANS 1944.100.466

Denarius with rostrated
column monument (135 CE)



RRC 419/2
ANS 1905.57.23

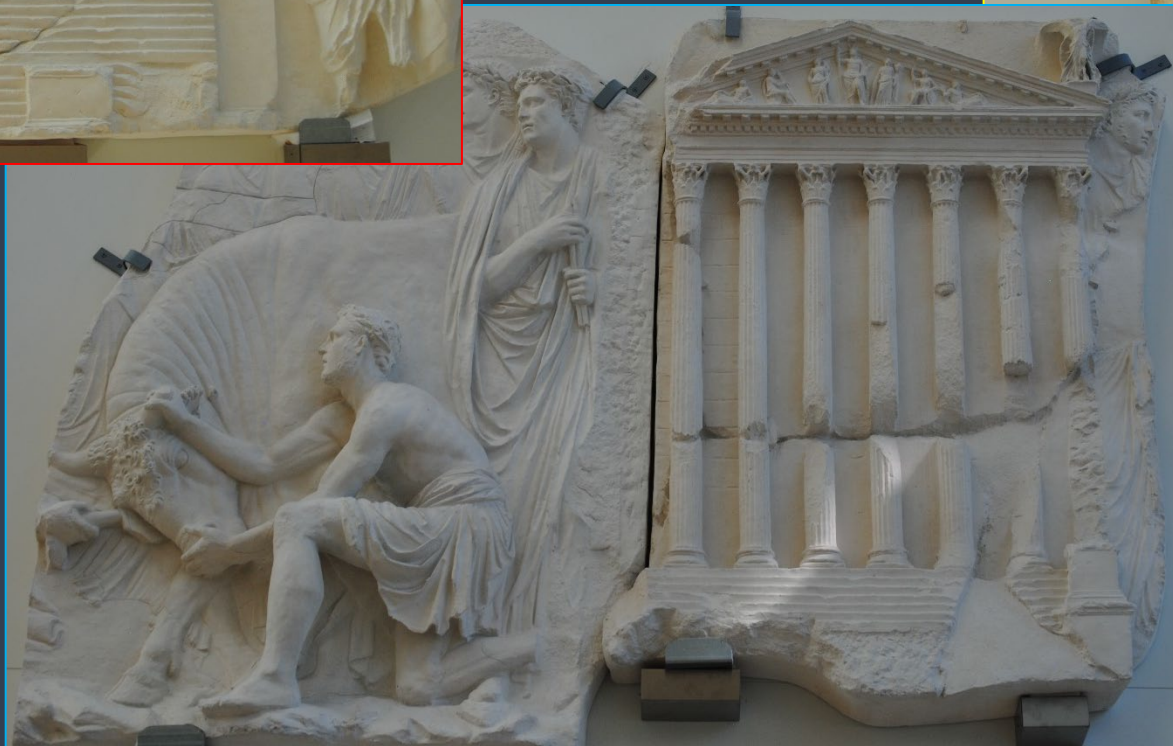
Series celebrating
M. Aemilius Lepidus
(58 CE)



RRC 419/1d
ANS 1937.158.192

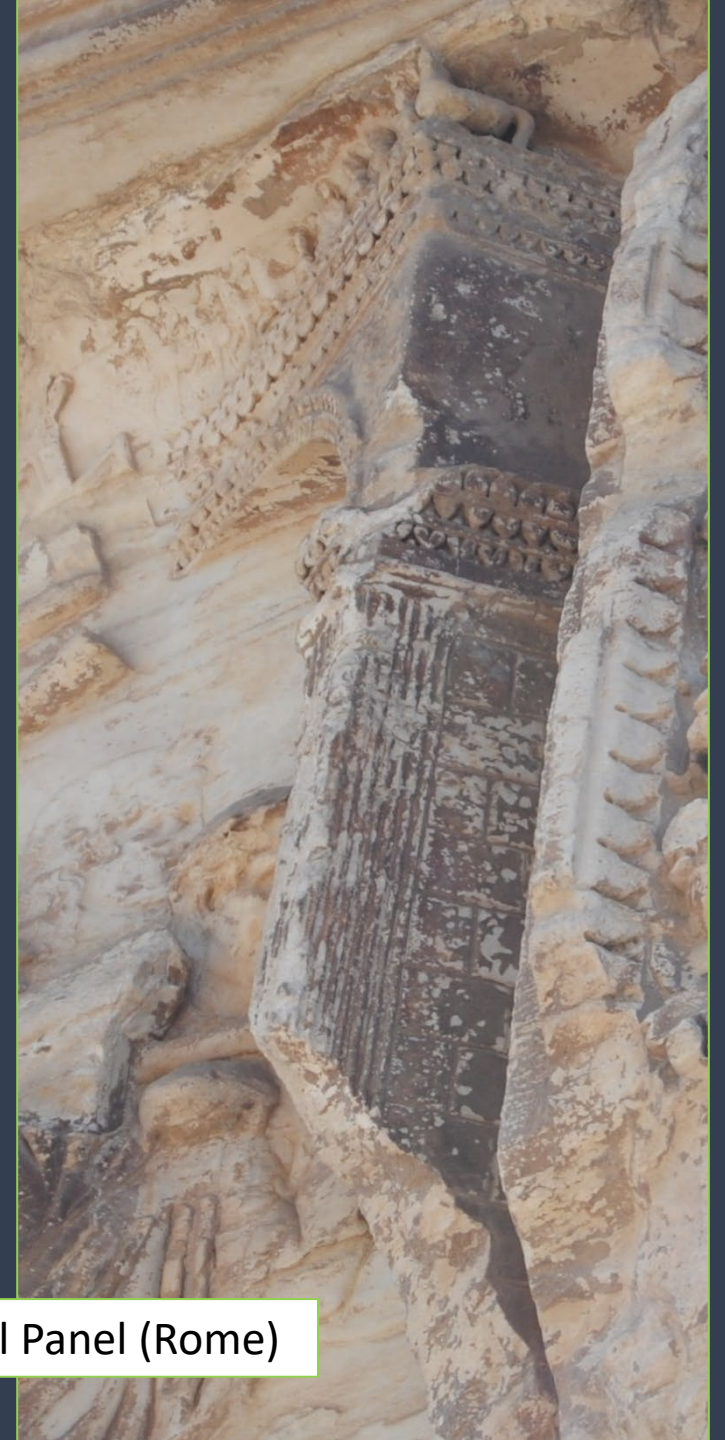


ANS 2002.46.487





Hartwig Relief
(Kelsey Museum
of Archaeology,
Ann Arbor)

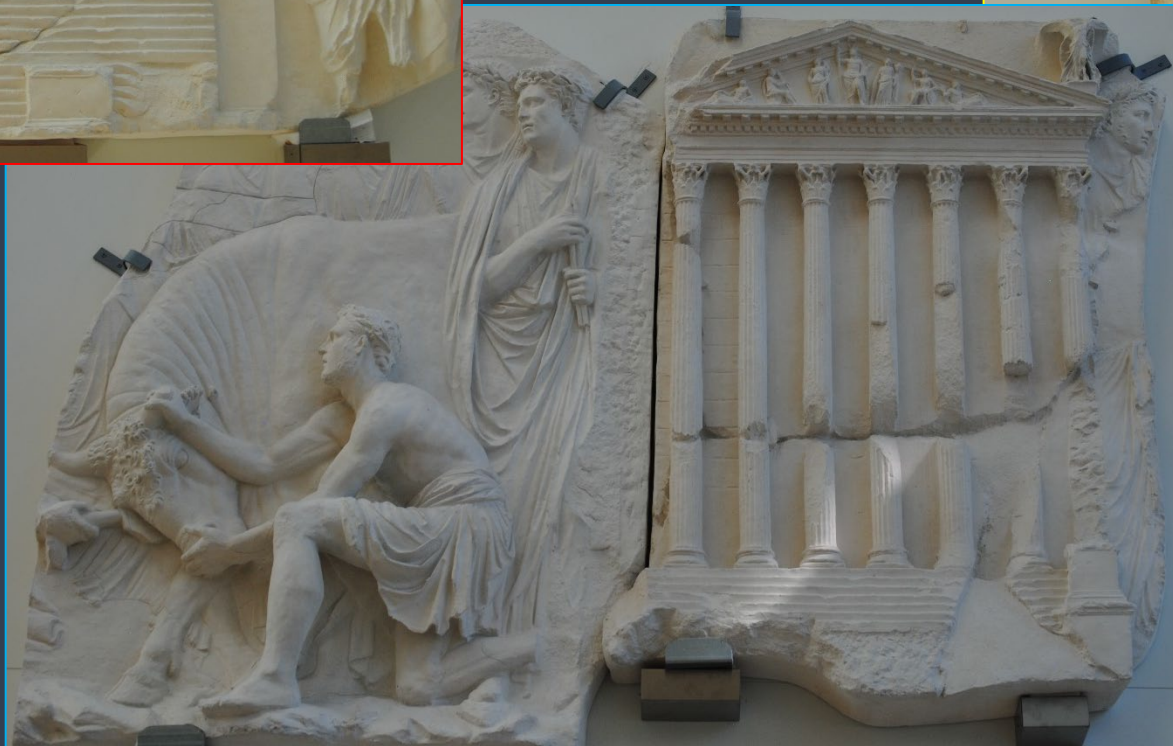


Arch of Titus: Spoil Panel (Rome)





Conclusion





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